

# The Pony-Handler's Guide



***Written By***  
*Dan Felder*

***Special Thanks***

*Newbiespud, Carson Dougan, Alex Wagner, Erin Palette, Kat Schell  
Inky Quills, Soaring Song, Alcazar Ward, Heat Wave and Charming Waltz*

## ***Dear Faithful Dungeonmaster,***

*I'm pleased to hear that you're planning on running a Pony Tales game of your very own. I hope you have as much fun as we in Canterlot have with this system and that you learn many valuable lessons about the magic of friendship. Enclosed you'll find a few tips about how we do things in our own game, both in setting up challenges for the players and some of the elements unique to running an adventure in Equestria.*

*I hope to hear from you soon,*

*Princess Celestia*

## **Welcome to Pony Tales**

Running a game in the Pony Tales system is just a little harder than breathing. Any skills you've picked up from running adventures in other RPGs will easily carry over to the Pony Tales system. Any of you who have ever run a game of D&D, Pathfinder or any other d20 system will have an absolute walk in the park. Even if you haven't played in these systems before, you should have no trouble picking up the craft.

There are dozens of great books and videos out there on how to build and run adventures in general, so this guide will focus more on what you're all here for - what you need to know to run an adventure in the Pony Tales system.

## **What's Different About Pony Tales?**

There are two significant elements that you need to know about before running a Pony Tales game. The first is how to handle DCs on skill checks, which can be quite different from standard systems when ponies have access to skills that can add anywhere from +10 to +20 a limited number of times a day. The second is how to run combat in the Pony Tales system, as well as resources for enemy statistics.

# Skill Checks



Just like in Equestria, some ponies are vastly better than their peers at certain things. A pony's passive bonus to a skill check might easily vary from as low as +5 all the way up to +18. With the use of talents like Freaky Knowledge, the bonus might climb up even higher.

Furthermore, ponies can channel the magic of their friendship through spending Magic Points to give even larger one-time bonuses. Everypony has the ability to spend their Magic Point to add a +10 bonus to a skill check. In a party of four, the whole group could band together to provide a phenomenal +40 bonus to a single check once a day. That's the power of friendship and the might of a group that comes together in common cause. How else could a group of ponies, however noble, stand up against Nightmare Moon?

This can make skill checks very exciting and allows the party to go above and beyond their normal abilities at climactic moments. You just need to bear in mind that a normally-daunting DC of 30, something that only a specialist with +15 or higher could have a chance at accomplishing, is easily within the reach of a party with a Magic Point or two to spare. Below you'll find a table of DCs for a beginning party with descriptions of their use. Remember, for each magic point used on the skill check, the DC effectively decreases by 10. So using a magic point on a Difficult check turns it into an Easy check. This is a great way for figuring out how to

account for the Magic Points your party has on hand.<sup>1</sup>

### **Trot in the Park - 10**

You probably shouldn't set DCs this low very often. It only has a 20% chance of failure even if you have only a 5 in this skill. If something is this easy, you probably should just let them auto-succeed and skip the roll entirely (unless you just want the players to roll for dramatic purposes).

### **Easy - 15**

Only somepony absolutely terrible at this skill should have real trouble. Others should be able to get over it with a little help.

### **Moderate - 20**

Specialists should have no trouble with this check, but other ponies could easily fail without assistance.

### **Difficult - 25**

Even specialists can foul this up at times, everypony else might want to step back.

### **Expert - 30**

If you aren't a specialist in this skill, let somepony else show you how it's done.

### **Master - 35**

If you're a hardcore specialist with freaky knowledge of the subject or some similar boost, you might be able to handle this. Otherwise it's a longshot for even the talented ponies.

### **Grandmaster - 40**

Rainbow Dash can pull off the Sonic Rainboom on a good day but what do you think will happen if you try? Don't try this check at home kids.

---

<sup>1</sup> It's also worth noting whether a check can have more than one magic point used on it. Some might be checks you can only use one magic point on, some might be open for one point per pony (in case some have stacked on Derp or similar) and some might allow any number of points to be spent on them.

The whole group coming together and spending their points on a single check feels incredible. However, if 4 ponies with Derp spend all their points on using Yee-Haw, that's +160 to a stunts check. And that's just silly.

I've never seen a party go to this extreme, players tend to want to ration their magic points, but if yours does; just treat absurdly high checks like this the same as if they'd gotten a nat 20 on a spectacular success and you should be fine.

## Even Higher DCs

The Grandmaster level DC is as high as anypony can expect to get without serious help from Magic Points and similar abilities.<sup>2</sup> However, this isn't to say that you can't set DCs higher than 40. In a recent game my party attempted to break through a wall of magical black ice, the wall of the Citadel of Winter, in order to help save the lands from frost. This was insanely hard, so I set the DC at 60 - but the party of five pulled out all the stops, spending multiple Magic Points and getting a great circumstantial bonus from a creative plan - popping the final check all the way to 63. They crashed through the wall friendship-cannon-style, bypassing the hordes of Windigoes guarding the inner sanctum and charged to their goal. Together, using the magic of friendship, your adventurers can accomplish things far beyond anything they could imagine on their own.<sup>3</sup>

## It's Witchcraft - Handling Magic<sup>4</sup>

In my D&D games, I let spellcasters break the Arcana skill in half. They can use it to improvise magical effects that aren't covered by existing talents, such as something minor like sending a signal light to the rest of the group or something major - like sealing a magical portal or abusing an existing time-travel field the group was within (think like in the game *Braid*) to jump back in time a few seconds.

The way I balance it is to decide how useful the game effect the player is trying to create is, then apply a DC that seems appropriate. If the effect is minor, like temporarily concealing a single item or the above-mentioned signal light, use a Moderate check. If it's a significant advantage for the group, apply a Difficult, Expert, Master, Grandmaster or higher check as appropriate. I could easily see DM's setting DCs at 999 or more for some things that simply shouldn't be possible.

In order to make Arcana more fair in Pony Tales, I applied the "It's Witchcraft" utility talent, so the versatile skill would at least come with some costs.

However, even with maxed "It's Witchcraft" - skills like Teleport are still relevant because, while narrow, you don't need to max the arcana skill to reliably perform them. Trying to Teleport with "It's Witchcraft" would be a very, very, very high DC. Attempting to duplicate the effects of any

---

<sup>2</sup> If assisting the player making the check is feasible, and that's completely up to the DM, then you might want to factor that in when setting the DC.

<sup>3</sup> If assisting the player making the check is feasible, and that's completely up to the DM, then you might want to factor that in when setting the DC.

<sup>4</sup> If you're reading this section and have no idea what "It's Witchcraft" is, it was a utility talent in the very first edition of Pony Tales that basically let players attempt pretty much anything they could think up using Arcana. It turned out to be impossible to balance in practice, being either useless or completely overpowered depending on the DM, and was eventually removed. If it's not in the rule book you're using, feel free to skip this section.

other utility talent should carry at least a Master DC or higher.

When DMing for an “It’s Witchcraft” user - just ask yourself how skilled a pony would have to be in order to be able to produce the magical effect they’re asking for reliably. Being able to succeed if they roll a 7 is pretty reliable, so just mentally add the arcana bonus you think would be fair (a +18 arcana bonus or higher is super-specialist at level 1) and take a look at what seems fair.

For example, an It’s Witchcraft player recently asked me what the DC would be for a simple teleport across a 10-ft gap. I figured it would take a DC of 30 to do something so useful reliably, which corresponds to a +23 bonus (meaning super-specialist + freaky knowledge or some other boost). If they wanted to do it instantaneously or under pressure, the DC might climb as high as 35. If they had a lot of time and were under no pressure, I might drop the DC as low as 25.

Now, something more major - like giving all ponies the ability to fly for a little while - would just be nuts. Even Twilight Sparkle couldn’t pull that off.

Finally, never let “It’s Witchcraft” have combat applications. You might do some cool things with it, like spending a standard action to try to wrest control of a magical golem, but definitely don’t let your players start zapping people with lightning bolts based on Arcana checks. It’s Witchcraft is already insanely versatile and cool - the last thing you want is for it to take care of combat checks too.

### **Handling Persuasion Checks**

Conversations can easily become boring for the group if Persuasion Checks are used as a way to bypass the conversation. Interacting with the characters of Equestria is one of the major attractions to playing in the setting and you definitely don’t want to have your players’ initial reaction to meeting a new character to be reaching for their dice. Furthermore, often the party-member with the highest persuasion score holds a monopoly on conversation with the simple argument, “Don’t talk! I have the higher Persuasion score”.

Imagine how boring combat would be if it was run like this? One player handling all the combat while the rest of the group sits around and without any thought going into strategy - just reflexively reaching for the same dice over and over again.

When I DM, I want to encourage players to actually interact with the characters of the world. If they want to persuade a character of something I always ask them, “What precisely do you say?” Then I apply a significant bonus or penalty, usually a bonus, to their Persuasion check depending on how insightful and clever their words are. I try to give +1 or +2 for moderately decent

arguments - as much as +5 for a very good one. If what the character says is truly brilliant and deserves almost immediate success, I might go as high as +10.<sup>5</sup>

Here are some examples.

Scenario: The players are trying to convince an insanely greedy and cowardly local lord to stop sending his soldiers out to kill a strange but good-hearted monster. The lord is also not bright.

-5: Okay, the creature might be dangerous, but wouldn't it be impressive that you weren't afraid of such a deadly creature!

0: Would you please stop trying to kill this creature?

+2: Maybe the creature has family that will get mad if you hurt it... And they'll come after you.

+5: I bet we can get the princess to reward you for your peaceful solution, especially if hunting the creature further is likely to get it mad enough to finally attack you personally.

---

<sup>5</sup> The first ever +20 was awarded in a recent game of mine.

A player had been serving as a vessel for a female god-like spirit of wind that was a seriously sensitive feminist. She often got irritated at how the player rarely asked her opinion on things (players often forget to include NPCs in planning discussions) and seemed to interpret every apology as patronizing.

Later, the god-spirit was stolen out of the character's body by a vicious enemy and when they tracked her down - still held in the blade he used to extract her - she insisted that she didn't want to go back. She told the party that THIS person actually spoke to her and asked her opinion on things. HE respected her.

The players were dumbfounded and after fumbling around for words, one of the players called out the god-spirit still housed the villain's blade, "He just thinks of you as an item!"

Now THAT was worth +20 on the check. She immediately turned and attacked the villain from within his blade.



# Adventuring in Equestria



## Dealing With Canon

One of the main challenges in running a MLP adventure is figuring out just how close to the canon characters you should brush. This varies by DM and playgroup, but I recommend keeping the canon characters involved in the periphery without the group actually interacting with them much (if at all). This makes it clear that the players are in the same world as the Mane 6 without getting into all sorts of weirdness when you try to play Twilight. For example, in the current Pony Tales campaign the players have visited Daring Do's house when she wasn't home to leave a book there and have crossed paths with one of Prince Blueblood's agents attempting to recruit a royal Canterlot librarian at his request. The ripple-effects of the changeling attack have also been a huge element of the campaign.

I've also included many characters that are similar to the canon characters, much like how Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic echoed characters like Princess Leia with the similar-personality of Bastilla or Darth Malak being a man with a breathing problem and a robotic voice, echoing everyone's favorite black-armored badass. Stylus in our campaign has had echoes of a Fluttershy personality, Charity Plush is slightly reminiscent of a wicked Rarity and Starlight - a new find - holds a loneliness similar to Princess Luna. This has worked very well for



our adventure, but if your group just really wants to chat with Twilight then go for it.

## **Just Add Friendship**

At their core, classic roleplaying games are all about a group of people working together toward a common goal. Whether protecting the one ring of power or trying to defeat a fiery dragon, adventurers live and die by the power of teamwork. As such, it's actually arguable that the positive themes of friendship are at their core of the RPG experience. However, most adventures tend to be focused more along the lines of, "apply sword directly to the problem" - which doesn't exactly fit the themes of MLP. Violence definitely solves problems, but if you want to capture the feel of adventuring in Equestria - here are some tips about how to include some positive themes within your adventures.

Below you're going to see two adventures that would be fine for classic RPGs and then how you might add some more positive elements to make a more pony experience.

### *Something's in Town* (Classic Adventure)

Some creature is loose in the town, a horrible monster with extra eyes, glistening fangs and all the fixings. Friends of the players are shredded every night by its terrible claws until the party finally manages to learn enough about the creature to figure out how to kill it and they track it down to its lair... Which turns out to be in the church's basement. A terrible fight ensues and they finally manage to slay the creature and extract a cure for its poison. Whether they find the eggs or not remains to be seen...

### *Something's in Town* (Pony Adventure)

Something is loose in the town, Every night walls of the feed store and similar establishments are broken down and food is stolen. The players set up to catch the pony responsible, only to discover when it arrives that it's a horrible monster with extra eyes, glistening fangs and all the fixings. Their every attempt to defeat it fails as it hits them hard and runs at the first opportunity. However, it never actually tries to kill them - or anyone for that matter. Eventually, after several attempts to defeat it, the players will realize that brute force can't work here and the fact it never seems to try to kill anyone despite numerous opportunities is notable. In fact, the creature even saves a young filly that gets mixed up in one of their battles before running away again. The players eventually manage to learn enough about the creature to communicate with it and track it down to its lair, where they can stop their prejudicial attacks and make peace. In doing so, and in getting the town to accept the creature, their former foe becomes a protector of the community. In this way, the players genuinely live a morality story, just like in the show.

### *The Devil's Due (Classic Adventure)*

On their way to their destination (wherever that might be), the players sign on as mercenaries to protect a caravan - the merchant running it paying more than ten times the normal mercenary fee. While traveling through a mountain pass, the players learn why. Ice creatures swarm the caravan, smashing its boxes of cargo. The merchant lets out a howl of anguish. The players manage to drive off the rest of the ice creatures, but a grinning imp appears and informs the merchant that he's failed in their deal - the goods of the imp's master have been damaged - and it's time to collect the man's soul and caravan as promised. Collecting the caravan would leave the players stranded in the icy mountains and almost certainly dead due to lack of food and shelter.

However, the imp seems willing to make a deal and will offer, if pressed, to leave the caravan if one of the players gives up his soul. A period of argument will ensue, as well as haggling, which will eventually lead the imp to offer a wager - if the party can defeat the imp's Master in battle by sunrise next; they can have the caravan. If they cannot, he'll take all but one of their souls. This leaves the party enough bargaining room to up the ante to all their souls in exchange for closing the loopholes in the imp's deal or some other reasonable advantage. The imp's Master is a Warlock collecting souls to feed to a dormant god, the corpse of the god trapped within the icy mountain itself. His den is the former lair of a young white dragon, the dragon collared and forced to be their guard dog. The players journey to the mountain, overcome the dragon guardian and its warlock master - shatter the frozen pool where the souls of many victims are being collected and trapped within and gain the spoils of the dragon's hoard.

### *The Devil's Due (Pony Adventure)*

On their way to their destination, the players realize the train they need to get onto (the destination is time-sensitive) is fully booked. However, the party is granted a free ride provided they act as train staff - either entertainment, serving food or anything else the players can come up with. The conductor puts the offer to them without specifics, letting the players figure out how they might help the train to earn their passage. Upon performing their duties, they notice the train owner in a gambling game with another pony in a top-hat and monocle. When climbing through the icy mountains, the top-hat pony manages to win the train from the owner - which he announces he'll take immediately. The train grinds to a halt and vanishes, leaving the entire train of ponies stranded in the icy mountains.

The pony transforms into a younger version of Discord, a little brat who loves playing games. When the players protest to being stranded, he reiterates that it was fairly won in a game and he *loves* to play games. This love of playing games is reiterated multiple times, and eventually the idea arises that maybe he'll play another to give the train back. He agrees readily, provided that the party wager something of value - such as their Friendship or their elemental affinities. Once the players accept the deal, lest they and all the passengers die, they engage in their antagonist's game - which involves them climbing to the top of the icy mountain to retrieve

the crystal there. Upon struggling to the top, they find a collared white dragon of tremendous size sleeping. They may choose to attack it, with disastrous results, but a History check or two will inform them what they might already know - that Dragons do not like being collared or bound in any way. If they wake the dragon to talk to it, they'll have a decent chance of making a deal with the beast to help them in exchange for them attempting to free it from the collar. If they do so, the little discord-brat will protest this isn't fair (when of course - he never mentioned a dragon in the first place). He'll find some way to worm out of the deal (such as insisting he never said exactly when the train would be returned or where he'd give it back) - leaving them stranded still. However, the party will be able to convince the freed dragon to fly them and the passengers out of the mountains and to the nearest town.

### **As you can see...**

Even classically-styled RPG adventures can be shifted to fit with the positive themes of a MLP adventure. Heck, that first one is pretty much based on Alien mixed with classic horror tropes - yet it transitions almost effortlessly to the pastel-colored world of ponies. As long as you figure out options to help or befriend seemingly hostile creatures and determine how doing so might aid the party - your adventure will fit right into Equestria. You might also design adventures with a moral in mind that the players are meant to learn through experience, but that can be a bit risky if it's not handled right. Just make sure that the players discover such positive messages through experience, rather than by having anypony tell it to them.

### **When *Hasn't* Violence Solved Anything?**

Just because the you're playing a MLP campaign doesn't mean you can't include combat too. The Pony Tales combat system is built to be fast-paced and fun, we'll get into how to construct excellent encounters for it later, and players are definitely going to want to give it a try. I recommend providing roleplaying solutions to most problems as well as combat ones, so that players can choose which path they want to take. Of course, every now and then players just want to beat something up. That's when you throw a changeling army at the Mane 6 and watch Pinkie Pie whip out her Twilight Gatling Gun.

This isn't a bad thing. Fighting a clearly-nasty-foe has a wonderful clarity to it. Instead of dealing with shades of gray or confusing mysteries, the players are engaged with direct conflict against a clearly wicked foe - one they can enjoy putting down. In fact, the more mysterious and convoluted the rest of your adventure - the better it is to have a few clear-cut combats to act as variety. The themes of friendship and teamwork are built directly into the system, which is why a lot of talents help your allies rather than or in addition to yourself. Enjoy applying your hooves directly to the problem.

## Friendship Letters

The friendship letter is an iconic element of the MLP experience. Including something similar in your campaign can be a lot of fun and keep things flowing between sessions. Try offering to give the party a small portion of Harmony for each person who writes a paragraph about what valuable lessons they learned in their last adventuring session - showing the whole thing to the group of course (and hopefully the Friendship is Dragons community, so I can read it too).

You don't have to restrict yourself to friendship letters either. Any nice thing that the party does for at least some other member of the group between sessions could provide a similar benefit. For example, if a player notices that one of the group's characters really loves poetry - that player could write a poem extolling the virtues of the poetry-lover's character. If you notice that your friend's pegasus is feeling homesick, you could work draw a picture of the pegasus' family for them or contact the family to remind them to write a message to the lonesome pegasus.

If the player participates in a bonding experience, the *whole group* gains 10 Harmony.<sup>6</sup> Each player could only gain a Harmony benefit from one such bonding experience between each session of course. A player couldn't just write out twenty friendship letters and get 200 harmony for the group from that alone. However, if your party comes up with some truly spectacular contributions that take a lot of time, thought and effort (such as writing a ten-page story of the adventure thus far, an incredible poem or a heartfelt letter that goes on for pages) feel free to award additional Harmony. Great effort and great emotional investment should definitely be rewarded. It's a great indication that your players are pouring their heart into the campaign.

---

<sup>6</sup> Yep, that means if every member of a 5-player group takes part in a bonding experience - the whole group will gain 50 harmony.

# Running Combat



Combat in Pony Tales is meant to be fast-paced and exciting. Below you'll find general tips on how to make the most of the Pony Tales system as well as the real milk and cookies; everything you need to create enemies that will give your players a real thrill.

## Fast and Furious

There are three main kinds of combat encounters you can throw at your players depending on the pace of your adventure and how climactic the battle might be. They are...

### Skirmish: 2-4 Rounds

Skirmishes are lightning-fast, used to quickly resolve encounters that aren't essential to the plot or else are used as a palate-cleanser between long sections of role-playing. Skirmishes usually involve quick duels where one side surrenders after reaching half health, already-wounded parties or vastly mismatched sides. Snips and Snails up there sure didn't last long before running

away.

### **Battle: 5-7 rounds**

Battles are real struggles, providing enough time for players to plan strategically; thinking several moves ahead. I use battles, often shooting for 5 or 6 rounds, for just about all of my encounters. They have a great mix of fast-paced action and strategic depth that can really draw players in.

### **Marathon: 8-10+ rounds**

Marathons are the real test of endurance, not just for the characters but the players too. Marathons can easily be either the most climactic moments of your adventure or else the most wearying. Marathons should be treated as evolving stories, with the situation changing in some significant way every few rounds. As long as the battle feels varied, it can keep going on a long time and still be fun. In one of my recent games, a climactic battle went on for a full four hours out of a six hour session - but we were all on the edge of our seats the whole time. How? Because in designing the encounter I made sure that something new would happen every round or two. Every single round a new enemy appeared, or an existing enemy transformed, or an ally was dominated and forced to fight on the enemy's side or reinforcements arrived to aid the players... And that kept the combat feeling both exciting and fresh throughout the massive marathon.

## **Tactical Depth**

Just taking turns whacking one another can get old very fast. Pony Tales' combat system is designed at its core to give DMs lots of options to create interesting combat encounters for their players - even without a board. Conditions like Blind and Weaken make it a better move to use non-offensive attacks until the condition is cleared up. Varying numbers of enemies can change the value of random-target, single-target and AoE effects. Turn to turn PiP-management means that players are constantly evaluating their plan - deciding between attempting to build up to high-pip moves or to use the smaller pip moves more frequently. The varying effects on a player's Special Move also impact the choice of what move to use in combat, as various special moves do different things based on the die rolled. There's a lot of subtle depth woven into the system.

DM's can take this tactical depth to the next level by cleverly including various encounter elements that keep players on their toes. This encapsulates everything from enemy-selection to expanded options that factor in terrain and similar elements.

## **Structure of the Battle**

Using a variety of encounter structures is a great way to keep players using a wider variety of their powers. Naturally some kinds of encounters encourage using different kinds of powers. This is going to be obvious to a lot of you DM's out there, but it's definitely worth thinking about.

### **The Big Bad**

One big guy, on its own, standing against an entire party alone. You almost want to root for the poor thing. Naturally, AoE attacks like Fireswath are terrible here and single-target or, best yet, random-enemy damage shines. Attacks that target random creatures in general though tend to be abysmal, as the chance of striking a player is a lot greater. Dropping a lot of nasty conditions on the enemy is also a great way to break the encounter, as blinding the one big bad cuts all enemy damage in half. As a consequence, Big Bad encounters should feature ways to get debilitating conditions off it at some cost (such as giving up additional HP or getting to attempt to save against effects at the start of the turn rather than the end) or else make the Big Bad so powerful that such effects are the party's only hope.

### **The Commander**

One big guy and several little guys. The Commander encounter is another great boss battle format, especially if the Commander has a chance to summon his minions anew when they fall. The Commander structure makes random enemy targeting much worse, as the little guys act like lightning rods. AoE damage is a lot more satisfying here, but best of all are those talents like Fireball that hit a primary target and several adjacent ones.

### **The Horde**

Lots and lots of little guys. Often there will be so many that you have to break them up in the initiative order. Hordes make AoE smile brighter than the sun and single target damage is abysmal. Often a horde will come in waves, starting with 5 or 6 weaker enemies and having several more reinforce their numbers every 1-2 rounds until their numbers are exhausted. This is both more realistic (it's hard for an entire army to swarm a few people at once, there's just not enough space) and a lot less work for a DM to keep track of.

### **The SWAT Team**

This is a more unusual encounter structure but a very rewarding one. Instead of impressing the players with a mass of enemies to defeat or a big, imposing monster - you put together a team very much like theirs. The SWAT Team will be comprised of powerful foes that work well



together, much like the players themselves. Taking apart a SWAT Team usually means figuring out what links tie the group together (for example, if one member of the Team is providing the heavy hitters with extra PiPs, taking out the PiP-generator will cut the enemy's offensive power). SWAT Teams should be designed as machines made to be broken, making it clear to players after a round or two what the weakest link in their chain is - so they can snap it. Interestingly, the combined presence of multiple foes and one or two weak-points in the strategy make both AoE and Single-Target attacks powerful. Certain conditions will be highly useful as well, depending on the specific way the SWAT Team functions. These teams are puzzles meant to be solved and taking them down can be very rewarding.

Naturally, you can combine these encounter types together - giving a SWAT team a big boss to order them around could be great. Either way, these are your main ingredients and including a variety of encounter types will help keep combat fresh. Do with them what your will.

## **Monster Waves**

Players like triumphing over lots of lesser creatures. However, lots of little creatures can be a pain to run and can overwhelm the players if 20 get to attack every turn. If we had a board to work with, it wouldn't be a problem - using terrain players could keep it so they only had to deal with a few of the creatures at a time. You can do something similar by running waves of the encounter. You can throw a smaller portion of the larger battle at the players at a time, varying the composition of the wave for an even fresher taste. For example, you might send in a Horde the first time, then a SWAT Team, then a Big Bad. If each wave lasts about 2 rounds (and the players get no breaks inbetween) then the battle will feel dynamic, exciting and more heroic. Waves also have the advantage of keeping your players from slinging their Fire Swathe powers at the full encounter, they can only blast one wave at a time. I can't emphasize how well it works to use waves for massive battles.

## **The Nature of the Beast**

With an understanding of combat structures under our saddles, we can finally dig into the core component of combat encounters - the enemies. However, I'm not just going to give you a big collection of beasts and insist you use mine.<sup>7</sup> So many people have offered to help with building the Monster Manual that we've decided to open the whole thing to the community. Yep,

---

<sup>7</sup> The length of this section makes combat look a lot harder than it is. Actually, Tales combat is one of the easiest combat systems to DM that you can find. I just can't keep my mouth shut about game design in this section - which is why I go on so long.

If you just want some quick sample monsters and have no interest in making your own, scroll down to the Sample Monster section. For those interested in making their own monsters, keep reading; a lot of goodies are packed in here about base-level monster design.

everyone will have the full freedom to submit monster-designs and send them to me for potential inclusion - getting your name listed right next to every critter you create for the upcoming Monster Manual.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, this section will provide you with two elements.

- 1) Everything you need to know to design and submit your very own monsters.
- 2) A few sample monsters that you can use to run your own games in the meantime.

## **A Few Ground Rules**

Monsters use the PiP system of combat just like players. However, there are several differences. First, most non-solo monsters should only have 2-4 combat abilities. You can make as many as you like of course, but keeping it simple in essentials is great when you have a whole army to run. Second monsters do NOT use player combat talents, they get their own unique combat abilities. Also, since you're actively trying to make fair monsters (and not just trying to cram together the most powerful options) you don't have to worry about keeping every monster's abilities on par with their peers. Monster-envy isn't a big issue to DMs. In fact, it's often interesting when a monster has one, really good [-] ability<sup>9</sup> much stronger than the others on its list... And the players wince whenever you announce you're using it. It, once again, adds more variety to battle. You can make monsters even more interesting by adding Traits to them - passive abilities that don't need to be paid for.

## **How to Build A Monster**

Several elements need to be factored in when building monsters. They are...

- A) How long do you want the battle to last?
- B) What is this monster's role in battle?

Believe it or not, those two elements are pretty much all you need to deal with. Now let's dig into what each of these elements mean for a designer.

### **How long do you want the battle to last?**

I'm afraid we'll have to use... MATH!

---

<sup>8</sup> This is a bit outdated; an official Monster Manual never did come out. However, there are plenty of designs scattered about the forums, and designing monsters really is quite easy.

<sup>9</sup> A "[-] ability" is a combat talent that costs PiPs to use.

Players have 30 hit points and usually go into the battle feeling fresh. If you want a battle to last 5 rounds and there are 4 players to fight... You set a target number for how close you want the battle to be. For example, if you want the players to get really beaten up in that fight, set your target damage for the encounter for 100 – which would leave each player with 5 health left if well-distributed. Of course, players are probably going to heal some of that damage – but activating a healing ability usually means that the player has to cut down his damage output. Once you factor in for your party's ability to heal and the amount of damage they usually do each round - that will give you an idea of exactly what numbers you want to target for each combat.

Let's say you're sticking with 100 for now. Divide that by 5 rounds and you have 20 damage a round. If this monster is supposed to make up a team of four monsters, you divide by 4 again and get 5. Now this monster should do an average of 5 damage each round - which is close to 1d10 (technically 1d10 is 5.5 average damage). This means that [+] abilities on the monster should do less than that, while [-] abilities should do more. For example, it would be fine to give the monster a [-3] ability that deals 2d10 damage to a single target as long as it takes two turns dealing only 1d4 damage to build up to it.

Whew, that's a lot of math but we're almost done. Just do the same thing for the monster's HP now, and try to balance conditions based on how much damage they might cause or might prevent. When in doubt, lean on the side of under-powered monster attacks. Fighting a weak monster at least makes the players feel strong. Fighting a monster that surprises both players and DM by blowing up half the group in one attack? Less enjoyable.

## **What is this monster's role in battle?**

If Fluttershy has taught us anything, it's that every creature (except dragons) has a role to play (except dragons) in making this world a vast and interesting place (except dragons). Taking this to heart is a core element of designing interesting monsters. Below are several roles monsters can play in battle that provoke great strategic elements and help add even more variety to combat. Naturally, you can combine these base ingredients or tweak them too.

### **Glass Cannons**

They deal lots of damage and are very, very fragile. These are the best enemies for players to take out first, as they go down quickly. An easy way to turn a standard monster into a glass cannon is to double its damage and halve its health. This isn't a perfect fix, some attacks are simply too strong when doubled, but it's a great tool for a DM to have when making monsters.

## **Tanks**

Yep, these guys soak up damage. They exist to protect some other important enemy and possess abilities to punish players for not attacking them as well as defensive traits like damage resistance or just buckets of HP. Tanks should often be temporary elements and not have too many powerful effects to force the players to target them - otherwise it robs the system of tactical choice. Either way, tanks protect some other monster on the field – design with that in mind.

## **Leaders**

Leaders help other monsters do their jobs better. These critters can come in many forms, whether handing out PiPs, extra actions, bonus damage or anything else. They're often the gears that make the engine tick.

## **Medics**

Medics specialize in undoing the damage the players have done. They offer healing, chances to save against crippling conditions, temporary hit points and similar. You don't want to use Medics too often or, if you have them around, make sure they have few hit points. Few things are as de-spiriting for players as watching an enemy's health go back up. It just feels awful.

## **Lurker**

Lurkers are the opposite of Medics and leaders, they exist to drop horrible conditions on the players – such as vulnerability, weakness and more. They suck, players hate them, but unlike the resigned annoyance at a Medic, Lurkers bring out a righteous anger in most players. Just make sure they don't mess with the players so much that they can't really fight back.

## **The Solo**

Whooo doggy, Solo monsters are a whole different breed. They need to be powerful, imposing and able to handle the combined tricks of a whole party. Designing Solos is both one of the hardest and most fun tasks of monster-building. Here are some things to bear in mind when designing them.

- Give the Solo a way to throw off conditions. Give the Solo monster traits that let it roll for save-ends effects at the beginning of its turn rather than at the end like most monsters, or else a way to trade some HP to automatically remove a condition. You don't want the party locking down your climactic boss with stuns and domination. You're DMing this encounter, not them. Make sure those abilities are still good, which is why you have to pay HP to remove stuns rather than just announcing that the monster is immune to them,

but make sure they're not going to take the fun out of the battle.

- Solos should be awe-inspiring. Let them deal massive single-target damage with their attacks, pile conditions on, blast the whole party at once... Flavor their abilities so they're chucking one player through the others like a bowling ball in order to damage all of them. There's lots of great options to make your players go, "Wow!"
- Solos have a lot of HP, so things can often get tedious. Fight this by giving them lots of cool, distinct abilities and – most of all – by having them go through some sort of transformation when brought to a certain health point. Maybe it's something as elaborate as changing entire move-sets and forms, or maybe it's just the monster growls, "Okay... NOW I'm angry!" Once it reaches half health and all its damage doubles. That'll freak your players out, provided the monster already seemed dangerous before.
- Solos can often attack more than once a round. Letting the solo monster roll twice or even thrice for initiative, taking multiple separate turns, can work well. This also lets you design cool powers that let you hit extremely hard in exchange for skipping your next turn (since turns come so frequently). Lots of fun.

## **Fodder**

Fodder exist for players to smash up. Want the perfect example of fodder? The battle droids in the Star Wars prequels. They exist simply so that the Jedi have something to cut through. Anyone who's played D&D 4e knows that weak little critters (minions in that system) are great. They're like popcorn and they're definitely fun to pop swarms of. Another fun game, watch The Lord of the Rings and whenever a character kills an enemy in one hit shout, "Minion"! That'll give you a good idea of the ratio of Fodder to more significant creatures in a classic adventure. Furthermore, fodder are great for a DM to keep track of - since they tend to go down in one hit. In fact, I recommend your minions only have 1 health but also have resist 2 or resist 3 - so you never have to keep track of their hit-points at all. They're either there or they're knocked down.

## **Sample Monsters**

Eventually we're planning on releasing the Pony Tales Monster Manual - a document that will be made up of the creations of everyone excited about the Pony Tales system. For now though, here are a few sample monsters you can use in your home campaign.

**Note:** All monsters start with 0 PiPs to make them easier to track and balance (unless otherwise specified).

**Wicked Lurker - 15 HP**

[+2] *Blind-Strike*

Target creature is blinded (save ends).

[-1] *Sufferer*

Deal 5 damage to target creature for each save-ends condition it's suffering from.

**Snicker-Snack - 20 HP**

[+1] *Twin-Strike*

Make two attacks. Each attack deals 1d4 damage to target creature.

[+2] *Blade Dance*

You may reroll all dice you roll on your next turn and take the higher result.

[-3] *Armor Breaker*

1d12 damage and target creature suffers vulnerability 3 (save ends).

**Mugger - 17 HP**

[+2] *Snatch*

Deal 1d6 damage to target creature. That creature loses 1 pip.

[-X] *Handoff*

Target ally gains X pips.

**Changeling - 20 HP**

Trait – *Shifter*

When this creature is targeted by an enemy, flip a coin. If heads, the attack targets one of the attacking creature's allies instead.

[+3] *Focus*

Flip a coin. If heads, gain 2 pips.

[-1] *Brainwash*

Target creature is brainwashed (save ends). While brainwashed the creature considers your allies to be its allies and considers your enemies to be its enemies.

[0] *Echo – Immediate Reaction*

Trigger - An enemy takes a standard action that costs pips to use.

Effect - You may copy that standard action, paying the pip cost.

**Manticore - 30 HP**

Trait – *Rage*

When this creature is bloodied, it deals +5 damage.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> "Bloodied" is traditionally used to mean at or below half the starting HP.

Trait – *Grudge*

When this creature takes damage, it gains a pip.

[+1] *Gnashing Frenzy*

Deal 1d10 damage to target creature and half that damage to this creature.

[–3] *Roar*

All enemies suffer a -3 penalty to their damage until the end of your next turn.

[–4] *Shattering Pounce*

Roll a d8. Target creature has Vulnerability X (save ends), where X is the number you rolled on that d8.

### **Drake - 25 HP**

Trait – *Smug*

While this creature is unbloodied, it takes a -2 penalty to its damage (including ongoing damage).

[+2] *Snapjaw*

Target creature takes 1d12 damage.

[–3] *Flame Roar*

Target creature and each adjacent creature suffer 5 ongoing damage.

[–1] *Dragon's Rush - Immediate Interrupt*

Trigger - An attack would damage this creature.

The attack targets one of the Drake's allies at random instead.

### **Guard - 20 HP**

Trait – *Punishing Glare*

Enemies take -2 to their damage rolls on attacks that do not target this creature.

[+1] *Glancing Blow*

Target takes 1d8 damage.

[–2] *Guardian's Stance - Immediate Interrupt*

Trigger - An enemy rolls damage and you dislike the result.

Reduce the triggering attack's damage by half.

### **Cannon-Fodder - 1 HP**

Trait – *Tough Little Bugger*

This creature has Resist 3.

[+1] *Poke*

Deal 2 damage to target creature.

[–1] *Prod*

Target creature uses a damage-dealing talent on its next turn (if able).



**Soldier - 20 HP**

Trait – *Fight On!*

Whenever one of this creature's allies is reduced to 0 HP or less, this creature gains 1 PiP.

[+1] *Skirmish*

Deal 1d4 damage to up to two different target creatures.

[-4] *Heavy Blow*

Deal 2d12 damage to target creature.

Well, there you have it. Those critters should give you a basic idea of how to make monsters for your own game as well as provide for fun fights themselves. I look forward to expanding this list far, far beyond as we create the Monster Manual. If you're at all interested in Game Design or want to help with this system - don't hesitate to contact me. My information's on the last page.

## **That's All For Now!**

There's a lot more that I'm looking forward to talking about in regards to the Pony Tales system, everything from adventure ideas to some of the really cool ways you can play around with the combat system. This guide will be expanding quite a lot as time goes on. Also, look for the upcoming Monster Manual and the Equipment Expansion, where we'll give ponies the loot that Rarity so desperately craves.

If you have any questions, comments or want to help contribute to Pony Tales in any way (whether designing new monsters/races/talents/gear, writing lore, creating campaign settings, making original art, setting up a website or anything else you can think of - feel free to contact me at [minimallyexceptional@gmail.com](mailto:minimallyexceptional@gmail.com).

Welcome on board.