The Book of BEASTIES

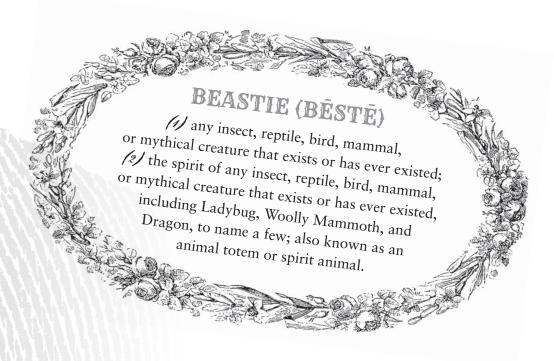
A-to-Z
GUIDE
TO THE
ILLUMINATING
WISDOM
OF
SPIRIT
ANIMALS

SARAH BAMFORD SEIDELMANN



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INTRODUCTION

Lears ago, I fell madly in love with a taxidermied walrus. I couldn't stop myself from returning to the shop where he lived so I could stare at the grand mysteriousness of him. I wondered, "Am I supposed to buy this walrus?" That felt like a really inappropriate impulse because he cost several thousand dollars, and I already wondered how I'd replace the income my family would lose if I quit my job as a surgical pathologist. My husband and I are both physicians, and we were also busy raising four kids (ages five to fourteen, at the time). I had the sense that I was no longer meant to be working as a physician, and my desperate aim was to figure out my feel-good vocation. But so far, I was just extremely worried.

I took a sabbatical that summer from my medical practice. I was unaware I'd been living a nature-starved, overcivilized life for a long time. As I started spending more time outside, taking more walks and noticing what was happening around me, I began to feel better. It seemed the more time I spent outside, the better I felt. A few weeks later, I stumbled into the ancient idea that the wild animals that cross our path might have messages for us.

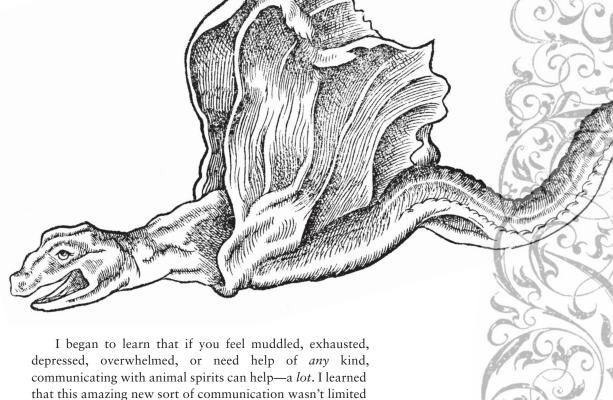


The night I made this discovery, I must admit I was skeptical. Wild animals can deliver helpful messages to you? How could a wild animal visit be of any possible consequence to a person? But I was also excited and delighted

at the prospect. As a young kid, I was utterly obsessed with Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom TV series (hosted by Marlin Perkins); I collected Beatrix Potter animal figurines (Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle!); and I secretly fantasized in my under-the-bed diary about becoming a veterinarian. Truth be told, I was a pretty anxious child, terrified of actual animals (especially the neighbor's dog), so that career choice would have been disastrous. But the thrill of wild creatures had never left me.

Bond with Your Beastie Book

Before you begin reading, I encourage you to take the following strange steps: give your Book of Beasties a big fat kiss, place it over your heart for a few moments, pat it gently three times on its back, and silently and sweetly ask it to become a steady source of personal inspiration and truth for you and everyone you share it with.



I began to learn that if you feel muddled, exhausted, depressed, overwhelmed, or need help of *any* kind, communicating with animal spirits can help—a *lot*. I learned that this amazing new sort of communication wasn't limited to "living" creatures. There was an aliveness to everything—especially in nature. During my training to become a physician, nobody mentioned the *ineffable and profoundly loving* aspect of the Universe that the beasties can help you connect with. My parents and other good people had tried to point me to it, but I hadn't been able to see. Lacking this critical knowledge, I had been struggling mightily to live out my mission to relieve suffering in the world—to be useful in the way I longed to be. But with a new willingness to explore the unknown, I learned that if you want to truly be well, this transcendent way of viewing the world is most vital.

Connecting with the taxidermied walrus and the spirit I sensed in him (even in his stuffed and breathless state) felt deeply reassuring. In time, I discovered that Walrus is a powerful beastie, offering strength, abundance, gregariousness, deep diving, and a generous skosh of sensitivity. To this day, whenever I think of that taxidermied walrus, a feeling of deep security washes over me, and I am deeply grateful for the wisdom that Walrus, the animal spirit, shared with me. I didn't need to buy the taxidermied walrus; it turned out I could carry Walrus with me everywhere. (Incidentally, the taxidermied walrus still hangs in that shop in downtown Duluth. I suspect he's whispering beneath his whiskers to other unsuspecting shoppers as we speak.)

Once I started communicating with beasties, things began to feel much better. During my "radical sabbatical," many amazing things began to happen in rapid sequence: I attracted a remarkable opportunity to travel to South Africa, I realized I was yearning to step away from traditional medicine altogether, and I found the resources to make all of that possible.

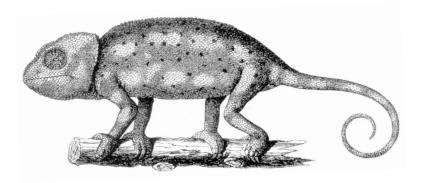
But the most important and *best* thing that happened that year was something I will forever cherish: as I forged a sacred connection with beasties, *I recovered a deep sense of peace*, *joy*, *and belonging*.

I began to have a deep knowing that love and support surrounded me. My resistance to what I wanted decreased dramatically, and I began to recognize beauty everywhere. I also experienced many moments of ecstatic joy. In my

early forties, it seemed like my whole life needed to fall apart a little so that I could become more buoyant. And the beasties were the doorway to that lightness.

That's why I'm passionate about sharing the messages of beasties I've received and teaching others how to discover theirs. Connecting with beasties helped me, and I know it can help you too. Plus, it feels good!

Whether you are a skeptical new explorer of these spirited seas or a well-traveled, savvy life pirate, it is my intention that this book and its large collection of "Beastie Portraits" will shed light on their fantastic attributes and provide you with delightful provisions to fortify you on your unique voyage.



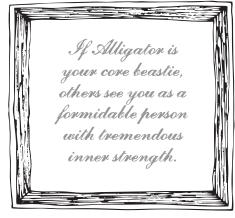
ALLIGATOR

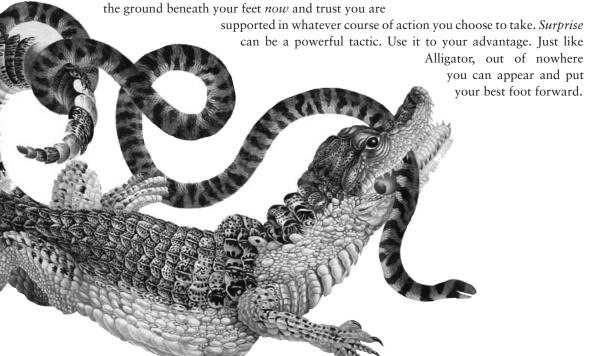
Stillness · Divine Timing · Patience · Assertiveness

As the rain falls softly into the river, I wait in absolute stillness. I'm aware of my adversary, the python. Her head is just above water, and her eyes are locked on me. Closer and closer... she boldly advances. Time stops. I feel the signal from deep inside. In an instant, mouth open wide, I catapult forward and hold her firmly in my jaws as she thrashes and resists. After hours in battle, my jaw exhausted, I release my grip and free her. She confronts me again with fresh strength, and this time, I retreat.

If Alligator has entered your life, it's an invitation for you rise to the challenge and wrestle with your most daunting adversary. One of those adversaries just might be you. Alligator advises that you treat your so-called darkest enemies as teachers. Ask, "What could they be trying to help me learn?" Spending time in stillness will help.

This beastie brings an opportunity to use everything you've got, to discover the edges of what you are capable of, and to assert your belonging. It's also good to know when it's time to back down. There's no shame in retreat. Taking sanctuary can preserve your strength and help you remember what's essential. Feel







ALIGNING AFFIRMATIONS

CHURN UP A WILD FROTH

Luxuriate in the lather of showstopping wild abandon.

POSITION ADVANTAGEOUSLY

Find the precise spot with leverage. Make the most of it.

CONSUME THE WHOLE

Grasp the gestalt. Let details go.



CHAKRA Root. Take a gator-spa: Soak yourself in a warm bath with a few drops of essential oil and immerse yourself, fully tipping your head back and just letting your nose, eyes, and mouth peek up above the water. Be aware of your breathing beneath the water, and relax and become as still as you can. Breathe like this for fifteen to twenty minutes—longer if nobody is banging on the door and the hot water doesn't run out.

BEASTLY PRACTICE Practice reverse Corpse Pose: lie with your belly to the ground (head turned to one side for comfort), for ten minutes—or longer if it's feeling good. Do this pose outside, if at all possible. Sense the earth beneath you, and let her strength empower you. See if you can imagine the earth cradling your whole body. Notice how you feel afterward. Repeat as necessary to recharge and clear your energy body.

VOCATION Alligators use tail slapping to announce themselves and establish their personal boundaries. If there's a particular territory or area you want, you'll want to make a nice, big splash to let others know what area you're claiming.

WELLNESS The spoils of the hunt are sometimes shared among alligators. Enjoy a meal communally, eating together, gator-style. Put food in the center of the table and let everyone "tear off a piece." No tail thrashing at the table, please.

CREATIVITY Alligators lay many eggs because the majority of offspring are lost to predation. It's a powerful creative practice to produce a *lot* of creative material and then let 80 percent of it go. To strengthen your work, keep only what's most vital. Don't be afraid to "kill your darlings."

RELATING Alligators hiss to let perceived predators know when they've come too close. Likewise, it will benefit you to give some sort of signal so others know to *back off* (as compassionately as possible, of course). Defend your space as needed.

LOVE Alligator males make low, guttural sounds to draw their mates near. Purring, literal or metaphorical, will create the fertile conditions for a connection. Use your most tender voice. If you are seeking love, whether you're male or female, don't be demure. The most successful lady gators press themselves up against their would-be suitors.

ANT

Cooperation • Beneficial Routines Achieving the Impossible • Guiding Others

It's morning in the rain forest, and I quickly move down the path with my family toward the bright blossoms, where our working partners, the aphids, await. Each day, my aphid friends allow me to drink the nourishing honeydew they excrete. In return, I offer them my guidance and protection. We seek the sweetest spots in the neighborhood for our aphid flock to feed in. Rain is on its way, and I move quickly to herd our helpers beneath a sheltering leaf. We are in constant search for better pastures to make life better for all. We are better together.

If Ant has appeared in your life, it's time for a group hug. Ants know that absolutely nothing could trump serving the greater good. It's time to reexamine all of your daily activities. How does what you do each day contribute to the overall well-being of your community: The family and friends you choose? Your larger tribe? The global family? What would it look like to self-sacrifice so that everybody thrives just a bit more? Or, conversely, what would it look like to trust that, with help from your crew, you'll be provided for?

Though small, ants have been able to thrive nearly everywhere on this planet by collaborating with others and using resources wisely. The ability of ants to act as shepherds, guides, and protectors of their community partners (aphids, for example) is well known. Are you being called to mentor an individual or group of beings? Heed the call to share what you know with others so that they might achieve their highest goals too. The guidance you provide will ensure that they thrive.



Be a tiny ripple. Join others to make a great wave.

TUNE TO THE MUSIC

It's all around. Filter signals for meaning. Add your voice.

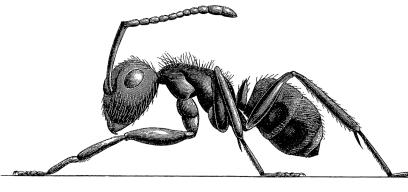
BUILD WITH PURPOSE Craft towering accomplishments, one grain at a time.

CHAKRA Heart. Imagine this earth as a superorganism that you are a part of. Her rivers are her arteries, the trees are her lungs, and you are one tiny being contributing to her overall well-being. What are you called to do today to support her? Think of tiny steps or routines that add up over time.

BEASTLY PRACTICE Instead of jolt-inducing tea or coffee, try beginning your day like the ants: sweetly, with a bit of honey in water—heated and with a slice of lemon, if you like. While sipping, ask yourself, "What good can I do today?"



VOCATION Cooperation is Ant's only viable path. Working with others, you can reach the highest heights. Given their tiny stature, ants build surprisingly enormous castles of sand, but they don't do it overnight. Take on big projects, but pace yourself, one tiny task at a time. You'll be amazed at what you can do.



WELLNESS Like humans, ants have divisions of labor, and they join together to solve complex problems. Join or launch a group, and coordinate your movement with that of others for mutual benefit.

CREATIVITY Maturity comes through metamorphosis for ants. Sometimes a creative work must begin as one thing and then undergo a final dramatic transformation to emerge as its true self, ready to thrive and be seen by the world. Trust that the original DNA is there, and with your help it will be able to attain its intended form.

RELATING If a bear (or other beastie) disrupts a wood ant's compound, the ants will spray the intruder defensively with formic acid. Put up boundaries if somebody is disrupting everything you've worked so hard to create. Send a strong signal (nonviolently of course) that the disruption is *not okay*.

LOVE Adult ants hold food in their "social stomachs" and share it with one another. Show someone you love them by preparing them a special meal from your personal repertoire—such as exquisite nachos or a humble slice of peanut butter toast prepared in the way that only *you* know how. If you are seeking love, be unexpected.

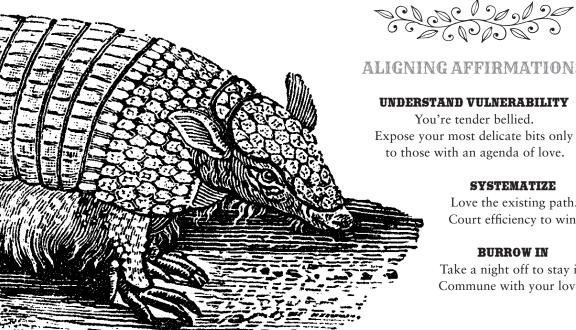
ARMADILLO

Intuition • Groundedness • Protection • Power of Vulnerability

Avoiding detection, I move very quickly, claws dancing across the creek-bed stones until—splash!—I dive underwater for a quick crossing to the other side. Once safe on the opposite bank, I pause to smell the air and check in. The sunlight warms my exposed nose. I discover a promising mound of dirt and throw myself into digging, digging, and then—boom!—I've hit the jackpot, and I feast on a bounty of termites.

hen the lovely "little armored one" trundles into your life, he's inviting you to move at a much slower pace: the pace of the earth. To move slowly, you're going to have to stop endeavoring so much and spend more time just being. These sleep-loving beasties have petite internal pilot lights: their metabolism is lower than many other mammals, and they must be careful not to become stressed from extremes of cold. You are being invited to check in with yourself: Are you overextending yourself? Do you need to return to your own burrow to rest and regain your equilibrium? Moderation is the sweet zone of the armadillo.

Armadillos also know how to dig deep with their claws and to use their long tongues to extract goodies from the earth to nourish themselves. It's time to discover what truly nourishes you. Now is the time to excavate those longings by gently exploring and feeding your soul. With Armadillo's help, when you act on your deeper yearnings, your whole being will become more vital.



ALIGNING AFFIRMATIONS

You're tender bellied.

Expose your most delicate bits only to those with an agenda of love.

SYSTEMATIZE

Love the existing path. Court efficiency to win.

BURROW IN

Take a night off to stay in. Commune with your loves.



CHAKRA Third eye. Because their eyesight is very limited, scent is how armadillos "see" to hunt. To assess things now, you'll want to *use all of your senses* to see without seeing, to *perceive* what is going on. With Armadillo's help, you will intuitively know what to do next, or it will soon be revealed.

BEASTLY PRACTICE Armadillos sleep up to sixteen hours a day. Putting your carcass to bed early, so you can get the most restorative hours of sleep physiologically (from 10:00 p.m. until 3:00 a.m.), will be to your advantage now. When your brain's hard drive needs to be defragmented, sleep is the most efficient tool.

VOCATION Armadillos sleep during the day and forage at night during the hot season, and they shift to more daytime activity during cooler seasons. Notice the seasonal variations in your own work. Do you need to shift your workflow to better meet this season's demands? What would feel just a bit more comfortable right now? How could you anticipate busier times so that you can stay on top of your list of tasks.

WELLNESS Armadillos would rather scramble away than enter into a direct confrontation. When Armadillo appears, it's beneficial, for the moment, to avoid arguments or challenges and seek peaceful retreat.

CREATIVITY Nine-banded armadillos are always born as identical quadruplets (sets of four). So four may be a helpful number when considering the structure of your creative projects (a series of four: four scenes, four colors, four chords, for example).

RELATING Solitude is the armadillo's strong suit. Unless they are raising babies, they prefer to keep their own company. If you're having trouble in a relationship, a little bit of breathing room could change everything. Learn to enjoy your own company. Notice that you are never truly alone.

fetal and quite vulnerable; as such, they need to remain hidden underground until they become more hale. Tend now to yourself (or your loved one) as you would a very small helpless being. Nurturing yourself and others like a momma armadillo does will render you (or your loved one) ready for adventure out in the world. If you are seeking love, dig deep and tap into your roots.

BADGER

Family Ties • Perseverance • Dreaming • Courage

Mother fox has just left her home. I sniff my way to the main entrance and quickly slip in. A bounty of cached fresh meat lies in the dry den, alongside a few sleeping kits. I ignore the sleeping young and dig in to the lovely buffet. Soon mother fox's snout is upon me. I bare my teeth and charge, driving her and her kits out of the den. We battle fiercely for ground, but alone she's no match for me. I retreat underground to continue eating. Mother fox comes back in after me. We continue this dance for some time. She continues to resist, but my pluck pays off. She retreats, and I finish eating in peace.

The courage and persistence of a badger is unmatched. Even when faced with much larger opponents, a badger will stand her ground. Badger has appeared in your life at this time because much is going to be asked of you. Despite how difficult circumstances appear, you are up to this challenge. A sett, or home of a badger, can be centuries old and is shared by successive family members. Look to your ancestors for support, including your family of origin by birth or adoption. Ask them for guidance—face-to-face or by praying for the wisdom of those who are no longer in the physical. How

> might they approach the challenges you now face? Returning home to your roots will give you an advantage.

Badgers' bodies have incredibly thick skin that is at the same time extremely loose, enabling them to squeeze through a variety of tight spots. You, too, have that ability to move easily through a variety of challenging circumstances. With Badger at your side, you can emerge encouraged from any predicament.

ALIGNING AFFIRMATIONS

BUST THROUGH

Find your second wind. Discover your inner warrior.

FAVOR FLEXIBILITY

Hang loose. Make like water and stay fluid.

EXPEND THEN MEND

Even a badass needs to heal and recover.

CHAKRA Womb/sacral (second). This chakra governs our creativity whether we are male or female. During winter, badgers spend much time underground in their setts, a small, dark, womblike space conducive to dreaming. Attend to your dreams by working with creative visualization. Badger can help you imagine into being whatever your heart desires.

BEASTLY PRACTICE Badger homes are passed from one badger family to the next, ensuring a successful refuge for each subsequent generation. Consider multigenerational living as a potential solution to benefit all. Another Badgerinspired practice would be to gather members of your family together to bring strength to yourself (and to the rest of your family). Does your home's content and appearance reflect your roots and the legacy you want to leave for your chosen family? See your home as a vehicle (literal or metaphorical) for ensuring future success for the whole family, and makes shifts accordingly.

VOCATION With protection from their thick skin and fur, badgers are mostly indifferent to bee stings, even when beset by a swarm. You may be called to handle tasks at work that others simply cannot. You've got thick enough skin to handle the challenges.

WELLNESS It's well known that badgers can become intoxicated after eating quantities of overripe fruit. Notice your own relationship to intoxicants. Are you imbibing unconsciously? Decide what would feel better and enlist support for getting there.

CREATIVITY Nighttime may be the ideal time to pursue a creative project, as badgers are predominantly nocturnal. Badgers have routine places they visit and develop "trails" or patterns. Set up a regular time and place to work for a few hours at night. Your creativity can blossom within the confines of a simple routine.



RELATING The size of badgers' social groups varies tremendously, from two all the way up to twenty-two. Have you been feeling like your circle is not big enough or that it's too broad and shallow? Refocus and edit your social circle, as needed, to support yourself. It's perfectly okay to shrink it, for now, to one true friend.

LOVE When badgers mate, it's a snuggly but loud affair. When expressing physical love to your partner, don't be afraid to express yourself verbally. Growl or chortle if you're feeling it. If you are seeking love, be willing to live out loud and express yourself in order to find the one.

SEE ALSO HONEY BADGER.

BARNACLE

Sexuality • Stillness • Receptivity • Fertility

Firmly rooted together in our group, I bask in the familiar currents of my shallow post in the sea. Lying on my back, I send up my feet to snatch plunder and nourish myself as food swims on by. Without my stable foundation, I'd be adrift and at the mercy of the ocean's moods. It's only through being cemented securely to the rocks below that I can exact my secret strength.

ot making a move is Barnacle's power. Are you feeling pressure to step forward and leap or launch? Barnacle is inviting you to consider staying put for a while. Leverage the power of being anchored to a firm foundation. Once attached to their home base, barnacles are able to thrive in fast-moving, erosive, and dynamic environments where others wouldn't dare to settle. If your foundation feels a bit flimsy, tend it now.

Barnacles also tend to prefer shallow places. If you've been digging too deep into your past or maybe getting lost exploring your subconscious mind, it might be time to come up closer to the surface, where the light is. The barnacle may be fixed, but she's never passive. In order to nourish herself, she must reach out and grab what's parading on by. If you see something you like, now might be the time to grab opportunity.



DWELL WELL

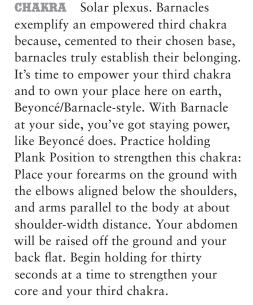
Enjoy your current position. Siphon goodness from your surroundings.

LISTEN TO YOUR BELLY

Your gut senses what you need. It will not steer you wrong.

SALT SUSTAINS

Tears. The ocean. In saltwater, everything is dissolved.



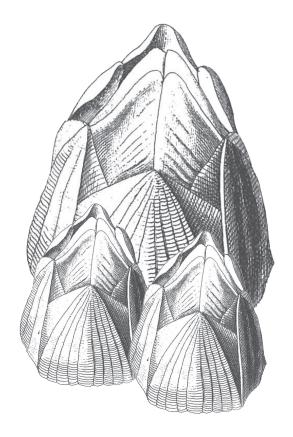
BEASTLY PRACTICE Gooseneck barnacles rely on waves that batter the shoreline to bring them the nourishment they need. Spending time at the seashore or listening to audio recordings of waves breaking will nourish your soul.

VOCATION It may be more powerful to hold your position than to go running after opportunities. Barnacles are committed to one spot and know how to harness the power of getting what they need from where they are. Barnacle can also help you find opportunities without ever leaving home.

WELLNESS The gut of a barnacle performs the function of a true heart. To see what is right for your heart, pay close attention to your gut reactions. Tummy troubles may indicate that you're off course. Lean toward activities and people that feel good to you on a gut/heart level.

CREATIVITY Barnacles are surprisingly well-endowed; they have the longest penis-to-body size in the animal kingdom. This fertilization device must be able to extend a fair ways because they are otherwise unable to travel. To fertilize your creations and bring them to life, you may need to stretch and extend yourself far beyond your rooted origins.





RELATING Barnacles use rapid growth and sheer numbers to compete for resources. Gathering your posse around you may be an advantage and give you strength to overcome relationship challenges.

LOVE The majority of barnacles are hermaphrodites and possess characteristics of both sexes. Similarly, each human being, regardless of gender, also possesses both masculine and feminine qualities. If there's an imbalance in your relationship, it can be powerful to ask what you need to express more: your masculine side or your feminine side? Do you need to act decisively or lean back and be receptive? Masculine and feminine energies are equally powerful, and it's important to select the precise qualities to fit your current situation. If you are seeking love, spend more time in stillness.

BASILISK

Power • Protection • Self-Reflection Eccentricity • Shadow Awareness

I amble down the path, spitting fire and venom. As they watch my approach, birds flush and flap quickly away, while smaller creatures on the ground scatter, scrambling for the hills. My flaming breath scorches the earth before me and every shrubbery in its path. Even boulders tremble and split in my wake. When individuals choose to challenge me, I enjoy rearing my feathered head and staring at them. To see them shudder and turn away in fright is pure delight.

The mythical Basilisk, a terribly misunderstood misfit, is here to inspire you to embrace your shadow side. Basilisks get a pretty bad rap for being such fierce winged serpents with explosion-inducing gazes, lizard legs, and murderous tendencies. A mere glance from a basilisk could mean death. The truth is that each of us has jealous, rage-filled, lustful, greedy, and power-hungry parts of ourselves. It's time to reflect on your dark side. With courage and willingness, you can acknowledge

and assimilate this shadow. You must learn to own it. To own



it, you must be aware of it. When you ignore your shadow, you do so at your peril.

Born of disparate creatures—the rooster, frog, or lizard—and having the body of a serpent, the basilisk clearly doesn't fit into any one single category. Basilisk's eclectic makeup also invites you to celebrate all the disparate parts of yourself, especially the nonconforming parts. Consider the neurosurgeon who tap-dances or the horse trainer who is obsessed with custom ball gowns. Let the "unsuitable" parts

of yourself come out to play, and burn brightly with the power of Basilisk.



ALIGNING AFFIRMATIONS

REALIZE RARITY

Embrace your freakiness. Eccentricity is a virtue. Live it.

RELY ON YOUR STEELY STARE

Be frosty. Let 'em sweat. Do what you need to do.

INCINERATE TO INVIGORATE

Burn off the old. Allow soft, new, tender growth.



CHAKRA Crown. Meditate or shamanic journey to meet a spirit guide; ask to be shown your shadow and how to work with it. Living in a world of light and being made of matter, we *all* cast a shadow.

BEASTLY PRACTICE Practice a quick and dirty yogic "Breath of Fire" by taking a quick, deep inhale, holding it for three seconds, and doing a fast, forceful exhale. Do it three times. The Breath of Fire is known to slay anxiety and pain. In addition, it helps awaken the coiled spiritual energy at the base of your spine (kundalini). A serpent, ancestor of the basilisk, symbolizes this energy.

VOCATION It's said that the gaze of a basilisk could kill instantly, even when just seen in the reflection of a mirror. Try

this self-reflection exercise to "kill" your issues with a colleague: If somebody seems to be thwarting you, identify first what this person *should* do: for example, "Nina should mind her own damn business!" Then replace their name with *I*: "I should mind my damn own business!" Look for evidence (no matter how small!) that this new statement is true, too. The truth always brings spectacular freedom with it.

WELLNESS It's said that a strong basilisk spends quite a bit of time in solitude in the forest. Get out in nature for a walk or stroll, and invite Basilisk along for the journey; ask him (or her!) to teach you something.

CREATIVITY Some eyewitness accounts of basilisks say that they are no longer than twelve inches, proving small can be mighty. Have you considered a smaller scale for your particular art? Also consider twelve as a guiding number for your creative project.

RELATING Because of its perceived fierceness and power, a basilisk was invited to protect an entire city in Switzerland. Consider volunteering your brand of fierceness to a vulnerable person, piece of land, or institution that needs guardianship.

LOVE The basilisk, by all reports, does not appear to love anything. Basilisk appearing in your life is offering you an invitation to begin by loving yourself first. Say, "I love and accept you, [your name]" into the mirror every day after brushing your teeth. If you are seeking love, befriend strangers.