



Fearsome Critters of the Woodlands



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RPG**



Fearsome Critters of the Woodlands

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Fearsome Critters of the Woodlands is a *Dungeon Crawl Classics* sourcebook for Judges. This sourcebook is a monster manual for the fearsome critters of the North America woodlands and lumberjack camps. Critters featured in this volume are the agropelter, chousarou, fur-bearing trout, hidebehind, hodag, joint snake, rumtifusel, shagamaw, squonk, teakettler, and tripodero.

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Now it happened that there was a mining camp in Colorado where more than an average number of the miners were bald. An enterprising hair tonic salesman from Kentucky decided to take advantage of this golden opportunity. It was a rainy summer evening. The salesman was headed towards the mining camp with four bottles of hair tonic under his arm. As he was crossing one of the trout streams which lead to the Arkansas River, the salesman slipped and dropped two bottles of hair tonic into the water. The bottles broke, and spilled into the stream.

Not too long after this incident, the fishermen along the Arkansas developed a new method for catching trout. They'd head to the bank of the river carrying a red and white barber pole and some scissors. Then they would set up the barber pole and call out: "Get your free shave and a haircut here". All the trout whose fur had grown too long or who needed their beards trimmed would hop right out of the water and be picked up by the fishermen. It wasn't until the mills began muddying the waters so much that the fish couldn't see the barber poles that the practice died out.

-retold by S. E. Schlosser

Remote mountains and forest wildernesses are home to strange creatures that are almost never found in dungeons, or any kind of captivity. Traditionally, the only way to get information about these "fearsome critters" is to encounter one, or talk to a lumberjack, miner, or hermit that lives in the area. Discerning what is merely a tall tale, and what is stone cold truth, is a problem for the players to solve!

Whereas many role-playing game monster supplements draw heavily from European mythologies, these fearsome creatures are all drawn from the folklore of North America. As a result, there are several ***Dungeon Crawl Classics*** settings where they are already obviously appropriate – areas that deal with Western, Appalachian, or post-Apocalyptic America.

The authors urge you not to be limited to just these settings when introducing fearsome critters. Just as, in DCC, orcs might appear in a Western adventure, or robots in what is otherwise a fantasy setting, so too might hidebehinds lurk within a dank forest near your PC's home village.

On Porphyra

Fearsome critters are found in deep parts of The Great Green, with less frequency in the Jotun Forest. Some stray into the Scrublands or the Holdfast of the Celestial Parishes, but only in regions far from inhabited areas. Elves consider fearsome critters to be inherent parts of the environment, and nearly sacred in aspect, from before the time of The Calling.

Agropelter

Something like a sneering black ape is wrapped around the upper branches.

Its whiplike arms and legs do not seem to have any middle joints. It stares down at you with large black eyes full of gleeful malice.

Agropelter: Init +3; Atk claw +3 melee (1d4) or throw splinter +3 ranged (1d3 plus bleed); AC 14 plus 1d3 (cover); HD 1d8; MV 30' or climb 30'; Act 2d20; SP bleed, cover; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will -1; AL C.

Bleed: Wounds from agropelter splinters bleed copiously and unnaturally. Each round, until a wound is staunched (taking 1 Action Die) or magically healed, it bleeds for an additional 1 hp damage. This is cumulative for multiple wounds.

Cover: Agropelters are usually able to gain cover from the trees they hide in. This gives them a +1d3 AC bonus each round.

Agropelters are apelike creatures inhabiting boreal forests – some say they exist to protect such places from human incursion. Similar being might exist in more tropical climates. They are somewhat intelligent, and speak their own language, although few are ever encountered in numbers.

An agropelter looks like a wiry, dark-skinned ape with no apparent elbow or knee joints; those limbs act more like a snapping whip or flexible tube, and the creature uses this property to hurl sharp splinters and heavy branches at unsuspecting passersby below. These creatures do not hunt or eat humanoids; at best they just enjoy doing it to see what will happen, as they have a rather evil sense of humor. They subsist in small family groups on nesting birds and their eggs, and can even eat rotten wood when they must.

They have a well-earned reputation for speed, and an agropelter encounter usually consists of splinters hurled from ambush, a gleeful hooting laughter from the trees, and then the flight of the agropelters before their victims can otherwise react. Such assaults are repeated, over and over, in the hours and days to come, so long as the victims remain in agropelter territory. Their favorite position to seek possible targets is in the hollowed-out top of a large tree, about 30 feet up. They are fully capable of snapping off a splinter and hurling it as part of the same Action.

No love is lost between agropelters and hide-behinds, with the latter attacking the former if they have a significant advantage in numbers, with hide-

behinds killing any agropelter they find on the forest floor. There are dozens of fireside stories explaining this rivalry, but the truth if it remains a mystery.

On Porphyra

Agropelters are found throughout the Great Green, especially in the west where that ecosystem borders the orcish lands of Azagor. Some cast-out agropelters have been said to have joined orcish society after learning to wear clothes and be comfortable on the ground, gaining employment as javelin throwers without their hosts really knowing what race they are. Most forest-dwelling giants near the southeastern border hate agropelters and will readily push down trees that the creatures fling their wooden missiles from.



Chousarou

What appeared to be a floating log rears up, with a small head on a long neck, revealing large, paddlelike flippers.

Chousarou: Init +3; Atk bite +4 melee (2d4), AC 15; HD 3d8; MV walk 10' or swim 40'; Act 2d20; SP gaze (DC 12 Will); SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +1; AL N.

Gaze: The chousarou can use an Action Die to turn its hateful gaze upon a creature. That creature must make a Will save or lose its next Action Die.

Forest lakes and streams offer the chance to drink, bathe, and possibly catch some fish for dinner, but logger and hunters know that they are not without peril. Even lakes that have acquired sparse settlement often speak of old legends of “something” living in the lake, creatures of surprising size but retiring personalities. These “lake critters”, or chousarou, are not very aggressive towards humanoids, but have been known to bump into boats and canoes, spilling paddlers into the water. Whether this is done in play or sport, the creatures may follow up by biting at their water-logged victims. Not everyone who goes out canoeing on a mist-covered lake returns. Bumping into or climbing on a “log” in a river or stream can also result in a dismaying encounter with a sharp-toothed chousarou.

Although chousarou are often shy, and not particularly malevolent, those who choose to hunt the creatures – or even fight back against them – have encountered the creature’s gaze, so filled with hatred that it sapped them of the will to move or fight. Perhaps this has happened to some who were never seen again, but often enough, the creature uses this chance to slip away, and those who encounter the chousarou’s gaze live to pass their tales on to others.

On Porphyra

The term “chousarou” is specific to rivers and small lakes in the Great Green/Jotun Forest region, though secretive “lake critters” are found all over Porphyra, even in Landed territories. Most are given a nickname specific to the body of water, and probably refer to a small family group that is seen individually. Larger bodies of water may contain lake critters of even larger size.



Fur-Bearing Trout

A plump, silvery-scaled fish leaps out of the frigid waters of the river and hisses! Most of its body is covered with silky white fur, and it has four stumpy, webbed feet.

Fur-Bearing Trout Swarm: Init +1; Atk bite +2 melee (1d3), AC 12; HD 2d8; MV walk 10' or swim 30'; Act special; SP swarm traits, immune to cold; SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +0; AL N.

Wily aquatic critters that have a habit of turning on those who would fish for them, fur-bearing trout can be dangerous in numbers, forming swarms of fish biting all targets within a 20' by 20' area. They have been known to bring down a moose and eat it, hide and all. The fur of a fur-bearing trout is soft and silky, much like a rabbit's, and waterproof; if a fur-bearing trout can be dispatched with a blunt weapon, the fur can be removed and sold for 1d10+10 sp per trout. A typical swarm contains 1 salvageable trout per hit point.

Bush Mackerel (Variant)

Bush mackerel are a related species to the fur-bearing trout that spend almost all their time on land. They spend much of their time in trees, raiding nests, chewing twigs, or dropping on edible things that pass under them. Some bush mackerels called holy mackerals serve Saren, the Tusked God.

Bush Mackerel: Init +2; Atk bite +0 melee (1d3), AC 13; HD 1d4; MV walk 20', climb 20' or swim 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +0; AL N

Holy Mackerel: Init +1; Atk bite +1 melee (1d3), AC 12; HD 1d6; MV walk 20' or swim 30'; Act 1d20; SP spellcasting (+6 spell check) [*blessing, protection from evil, word of command*]; SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +2; AL N

On Porphyra

Fur-bearing trout and bush mackerel are found in or near any small stream or river in The Great Green and the Jotun Forest and the shrubbery nearby. Their bodies, mounted by taxidermists, are found in many taverns in the Western Continent, but very few of them are actually real amphibious fish.



Hidebehind

You vaguely glimpse...something...out of the corner of your eye. And then it is gone.

Hidebehind: Init +4; Atk bite +4 melee (1d6+2) or claws +4 melee (1d4+2 plus drag), AC 16; HD 3d8+3; MV 50'; Act 2d20; SP drag away 30' if two claws hit the same target [dragged creatures are unable to speak, yell, or cast spells], hide in forest +7 [this applies to dragged creatures as well], sneak silently +7; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1; AL C

Too often has the mournful observation of "The hide-behind done got 'im," been heard when a lumberjack or prospector did not return from a sojourn in the forest. The critter has been so seldom observed, and even then so little of it been seen by victims who survive, that it is difficult to give a proper description. It is painfully thin, perhaps supernaturally so, dark, perhaps simian, and moves with inhuman speed. The hide-behind has a taste for well-fed humanoids, which they quietly grab and drag off to their lairs under huge dark trees to feast upon. Even when a hide-behind is slain, its body decomposes so rapidly that little can be said about what it was in life.

Hide-behinds are quite intelligent and are suspected of listening to camp conversations, using what they learn to secure lone workers for a meal. Almost nothing is known of its habits, social or otherwise, though most are sure it is a cruel being, which will growl words and make noises in the forest to unnerve those that it is stalking. The hide-behind gets its name from its typical strategy of stalking victims, only to "hide behind" the trunk of even relatively slender trees when one turns around to look at what is following him.

Though a hide-behind is more than 8 ft. tall, its chest expansion is barely a foot and a half, and its skull is no bigger than a fox's. Hide-behinds prefer to hunt by the day, although they will hunt at any time. It is said that they greatly dislike the smell or taste of alcohol, and lack of sobriety may have saved more than one possible victim.

On Porphyra

Hide-behinds do not respect the presence of any races in their hunting territories, and will ambush elves, humans. They are hunted by well-equipped teams of elves, but these hunts are not often successful.



Hodag

The creature is the size of a tiger, but its dark fur and stocky build are more like a bear's. It sports huge, saber-like fangs, a double-row of teeth, horns, and a row of spines down its back and whiplike tail. Its eyes glow redly as it moves towards you, stiff-legged, with a low, hungry growl.

Hodag: Init +0; Atk bite +6 melee (1d8+4) or horns +4 melee (1d7+4) or claws +5 melee (1d6+4) or tail spikes (1d5+4 plus knock prone), AC 14; HD 5d8+10; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP knock prone, breathe smoke, stiff-legged; SV Fort +6, Ref -4, Will +3; AL C

Breathe Smoke: Once per hour, a hodag can breathe a cloud of irritating smoke with a 10' radius. Creatures caught within this cloud must succeed in a DC 10 Fort save or lose their next Action Die due to coughing and choking. This does not use an Action Die on the part of the hodag.

Knock Prone: A PC hit by the hodag's tail must succeed in a DC 15 Strength check or be knocked prone. If knocked prone, a DC 10 Reflex save is required to maintain a grip on anything held in the PC's hands.

Stiff-legged: A hodag's thick limbs have no knee joints. If the creature is ever knocked prone, it is immediately reduced to 1d14 for Action Dice, and cannot rise without succeeding in a DC 15 Reflex save.

These much-feared monsters are thankfully rare, for their voraciousness is legendary. Believed to have first spawned in the alternate plane of Nisnociw, they nonetheless have slipped through the walls that ward one reality from another. They seem to do nothing more than hunt, feed, and sleep. No one has ever seen a mated pair or young (or at least done so and lived to speak of it), so details of their reproduction remain a mystery.

Hodags cannot easily rise once they are prone, so they sleep leaning against trees or in shallow caves (where possible). They tend to use the same spots repeatedly. Those who would hunt these creatures look for the worn bark where a hodag has repeatedly leaned against a tree. They saw through most of the tree on the far side, and then wait for the hodag to lean against the trunk, hopefully bringing down the tree and the creature with it.

The risk in doing this, of course, is that there is a ravenous monster hunting

the area where the would-be hunters are sawing noisily through tree trunks. Under these circumstances, the hunter can all too easily become the prey.

On Porphyra

Hodags are as rare on Porphyra as anywhere else, but they have been encountered in both The Great Green and the Jotun Forest. Nothing is safe where these ravenous creatures lurk, so that even habitual enemies may swear a temporary truce to hunt the monsters down and put an end to them.



Joint Snake

In the half-light of the forest you can see what looks like a heavy rope made of... glass? It seems to be a long snake or lizard stiffly moving through the litter of the forest floor.

Joint Snake: Init +3; Atk bite +2 melee (1d3+1), AC 12; HD 1d8+2; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP absorb metal; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +0; AL N

Absorb Metal: An injured joint snake can use an action to absorb a metal object that weighs 2 lbs. or less. When it absorbs metal, it heals 1d4 hit points and gains a +2 bonus on its next attack due to renewed vigor.

Joint snakes are quite easily noticed, unlike most snakes that one sees in a forest setting. Their glassy scales are heavy and stiff and they move very deliberately - although they can strike a target with great speed.

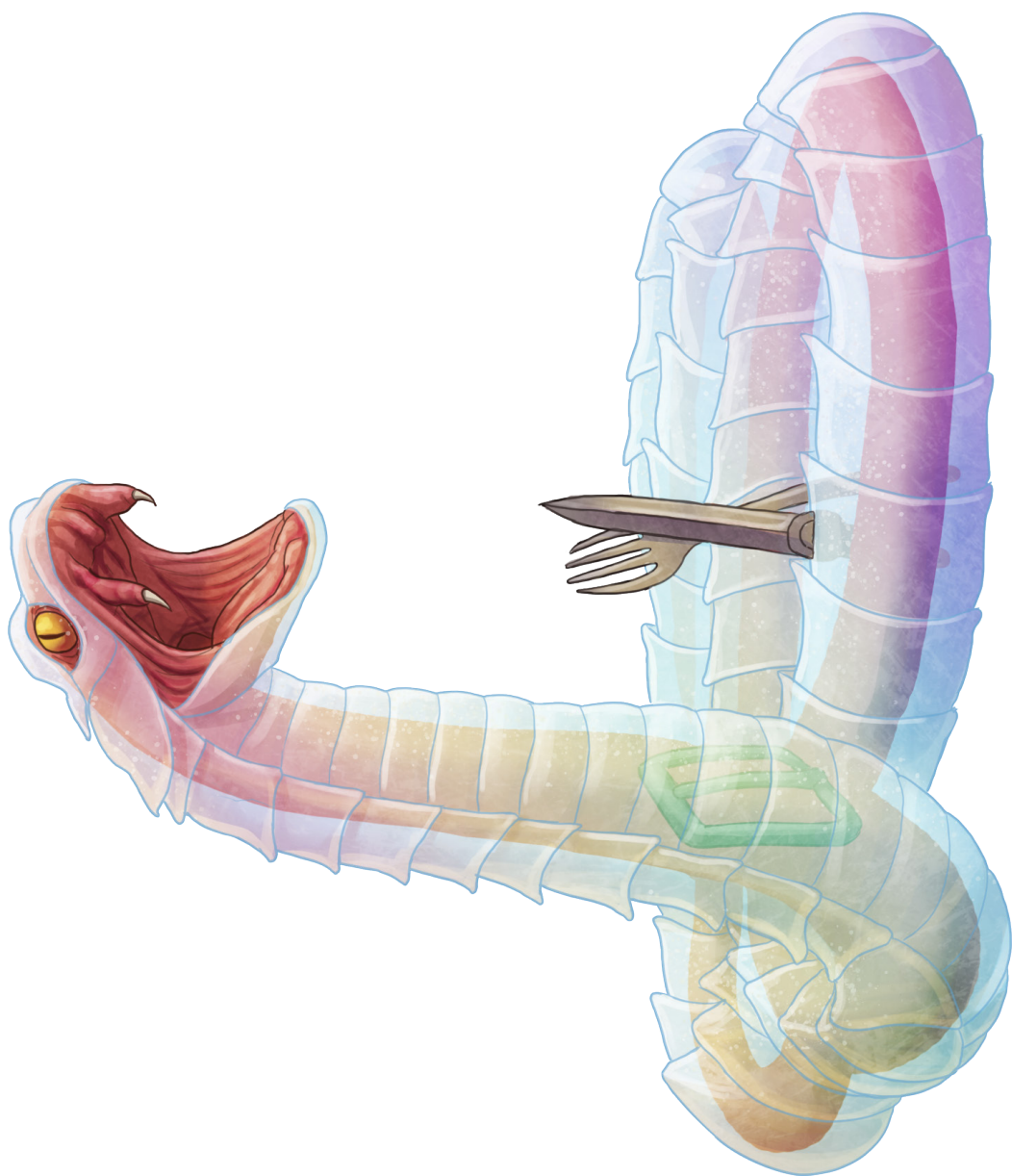
Joint snakes are attracted to shiny things like themselves, perhaps because they prefer to eat large beetles and the odd bush mackerel they might come across. Being somewhat intelligent, joint snakes like shiny coins and the like, and often cozy up to a prospector's pan or a stray pocketknife, which a joint snake may incorporate into its body with its regenerative power.

Many prospectors have tried to cut up a joint snake found in their camp, only to have it absorb the very weapon that was used against it! Putting an end to the critter with a rawhide tent-peg hammer will get the tool back, unless it scurries off into the bush.

Though attacks against a joint snake may sever pieces from it, it always grows back to its full 4 ft. length unless pounded into pieces.

On Porphyra

Joint snakes are among the few fearsome critters that might be found in typical "dungeon" settings, as they are comfortable underground, and are the scourge of miners who sleep there during a long shift. They are infamous in Creeper's Rift for giving birth to live young among a pile of glittering ore, where the snakelings will bite the first miner to touch it!



Rumtifusel

Draped over the large stump, in the middle of the forest, is a gorgeous mink coat, apparently just left there! Two buttons on the back of the coat gleam as though they were of silver...

Rumtifusel: Init +1; Atk envelop +2 melee (1d4+2 plus suffocate), AC 15; HD 3d8+3; MV walk 20' or climb 20'; Act 1d20; SP just a jacket [5% chance per round to detect as a creature, if it surprises a creature it gains a +4 bonus to attack], envelop (target takes ½ damage taken by creature), suffocate (1d4 temporary Stamina damage per round); SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +0; AL C

Suffocate: A creature enveloped by a rumtifusel takes 1d4 temporary Stamina damage each round. The rumtifusel can be removed before the creature's death with an opposed Strength check vs. +6 or by a Mighty Deed of 4+. If the victim survives, the temporary Stamina damage is recovered at a rate of 1 point per round.

Rumtifusels are solitary and sly creatures that look like nothing so much as luxurious fur coats, perhaps with two pearl or silver buttons on the back (the creature's eyes). It is concerned only with its next meal, and perhaps claiming a pretty bauble to attach to its hide as a sign of its prowess...and to attract more humanoid dinners.

They prefer humanoid meals, so they are attracted to the vicinity of logging camps, traplines, and mine shafts, perhaps more than most fearsome critters. They can subsist on forest animals if they must, such as squirrels and birds, attracted to nesting materials, or crows attracted to eyes like shiny baubles.

Rumtifusels are never found in pairs or with young, so it is likely they reproduce by fission or some other asexual method, keeping to large personal territories. A rumtifusel will hibernate by folding itself into the crevice of a giant tree for the hottest months of the year, awakening to hunt when the leaves start to turn.

On Porphyra

Rumtifusels are rare anywhere, and live in parts of the deep forest that are chilly and cold at the best of times. Stories of "killer coats" have come from as far east as the Giant's Retreat and the logging and prospecting camps there.



Shagamaw

An unlikely beast plods deliberately down the cut-line, its front half resembling a bear with short, wicked horns, and the back half like that of an elk. It currently is walking on its hind legs!

Shagamaw: Init +2; Atk gore +4 (1d6+1) or claws +4 (1d4+1), AC 12; HD 2d8+4; MV 30'; Act 3d20; SP difficult to track [-2d on the dice chain to track], rend for additional 1d6 if two claws hit the same target in one round, shredding horns [Ref DC 12 when hit by a gore attack or armor bonus is reduced by 1d3 per successful attack]; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +1; AL N

The shagamaw is an odd beast, even among fearsome critters, as its favorite food happens to be clothing. Many a logger or prospector has hung his laundry out on the line, only to find it eaten to the clothespins by this large beast. They have also eaten canvas tents out from over top of sleepers in the forest. It has been observed in the wild eating the bark from large trees, but will go to great lengths to eat cloth, even so far as to attack travellers.

They are also legendary for their strange method of locomotion. These creatures are equally capable of walking on front legs and back, alternating bear paws and elk hooves in an unpredictable pattern, and many fights in-camp have come about because of arguments as to what beast the gang had been tracking that day.

Shagamaws mate in the spring, as bear and elk do, and the female raises the single young (rarely, twins). Apart from mating season, or a female and her young, the creatures are solitary. Males duel over mating rights, woe to the overcurious observer, as the males will tear any cloth-wearers apart in order to impress any watching female with the resultant delicacy.

The call of a shagamaw is to the roar of dragons, which has raised the hair on many the neck of a fearful logger who hears it.

On Porphyra

Shagamaws are quite widespread, though rumors of their presence may simply be due to their maddening tracks, as signs of bear and elk are mistaken for the fearsome critters. From the Scrublands to Giant's Retreat, these beasts are the bane of tent-owners and flag-bearers alike. There is a Shagamaw subclan of orcs in Giant's Retreat that prefer to fight naked, much to the dismay of their enemies.



Squonk

A truly hideous little beast, with ill-fitting hide covered with warts and moles, dripping rheumy eyes, and a faintly foul smell of moldy socks and spoiled beer.

Squonk: Init +0; Atk bite +0 (1d3), AC 12; HD 1d6; MV 30'; Act 1d16; SP dissolve, immune to magic, nausea cloud 10' radius (Fort DC 10 or creature suffers -1d on the dice chain to all actions); SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will +1; AL N

Dissolve: A squonk may dissolve into a puddle of its own tears as an action. As a puddle it cannot be harmed and make no attacks but it can still move. It heals 1 hp per round in this liquid form. It can reform as an action.

One of the more popular stories around logging camp and prospector campfires is that of the squonk, said to be the ugliest creature to ever see the light of day. Constantly weeping with self-pity, the squonk is just smart enough to know it is hideous, and cannot bear to be seen by another being. It dissolves into a pool of tears when captured...sometimes even when observed. They shun their own reflections.

Squonks are carrion eaters that timidly seek food at twilight, though they are often scared off by ants and flies that find a carcass they are feeding on. Luckily, they need very little to sustain them.

The repulsive creatures are sometimes hunted by bush explorers for the unique qualities of their ever-present tears. In their raw form squonk tears can be applied to a blade, such as an axe, and it will gain a +1d damage bonus on the dice chain for an hour. Some old hands say that if boiled down to a thimbleful, squonk tears form a powerful liquor that is the equivalent of a full bottle of rotgut whiskey.

On Porphyra

Squonks are found in the deepest parts of the Great Green. They are admired and pitied by the elves and other races there as both an example and recipient of true compassion, for they are constantly crying over nothing. The elves look dimly on those who would hunt squonks for their tears, although the few alchemists that believe in squonks prize their tears greatly and offer rewards large enough to bring fools to the woods where fearsome critters dwell.



Teakettler

This little creature looks like a potbellied gray dog with large pointed ears and faintly glowing yellow eyes. Wisps of steam seep from its mouth and... back end.

Teakettler: Init +0; Atk bite +1 (1d3), AC 14; HD 1d6; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP breath weapon [steam, 2d3 damage, Ref DC 12 for half damage], immune to fire, spellcasting (spell check +8; *choking cloud*); SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +0; AL N

Campfire tales often mention a tired and thirsty band of loggers hearing the familiar whistle of a tea kettle with a full head of steam. Upon following the sound, though, they find nothing, not even tracks of man or beast. Sometimes even what looks like the billowing smoke from a fire of damp wood shows above the treeline, and again, no sign of fire, man, or beast is found when the source area is explored. These phenomena are the actions of the teakettler, a small doglike beast that is slightly brighter than the average hound. These critters are rumored to be the personal hunting beasts of fire-based elemental beings vacationing in burning forests.

Most of the time, a teakettle isn't trying to draw attention to itself. It is steaming rabbits out of their holes or bush mackerel from their copses - or using its talents to drive off larger predators. At other times, they just seem to like making loggers and miners rush around in confusion, laughing a doglike laugh while concealed in nearby bushes.

Teakettlers are almost impossible to track as they walk backwards with a very light step, leaving no discernible mark. They mate for life and raise their pups in shallow holes in riverbanks where they can scare up a fur-bearing trout or two for dinner. There have been no stories yet of raising teakettler pups in captivity, as they scald any stranger who tries to pick them up as readily as their parents do.

On Porphyra

Teakettlers inhabit forests near rivers in much the same proximity as amphibious fish, wolpertingers and mundane rabbits. There have been many stories of influential zendiqi sultans who have obtained teakettlers as pets, sure that they are sympathetic beings of elemental nature, though even their own scholars are unsure as to the veracity of this theory, and the stories are largely viewed as apocryphal.



Tripodero

This bizarre creature resembles a large, fat crane with brown and green feathers, balancing on a stiff tail. Its beak is long and tubular, and its legs are strangely segmented, with clawed, circular feet.

Tripodero: Init +4; Atk claw +2 (1d3) or pellet +4 (1d4+1 plus knockout), AC 12; HD 1d8+1; MV 30' or fly 50'; Act 2d20; SP knockout (+1d4 deed die using Subdual Weapon Knockout table from Mighty Deeds of Arms; does not add to attack roll or damage), sniper, stable (-2d penalty on attempts to trip or bull rush); SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +0; AL N

Sniper: The pellet shot has the same maximum range as a crossbow. Tripodero suffer no penalties due to range and can attack from surprise with a +4 bonus at long range.

The fearsome critter called the tripodero is named so for its stance assumed when it performs its dangerous attack, spitting hardened lumps of clay at its prey through its tubular beak. It keeps its clay “bullets” stored in its cheek, and is deadly accurate with them. Its typical prey includes birds and small mammals, which it detects by telescoping its legs up to ten feet long, rising above the scrubland and undergrowth of its preferred terrain.

A firing tripodero balances on its stiff tail, providing an excellent firing platform, and they attack in almost complete silence. Tripoderos move quickly through scrub and undergrowth, and are not impeded by it. They will always try to shoot at intruding prey rather than attack it in melee, saving their claws for ripping apart stunned prey or defense if confronted. Tripoderos can fly, but don't like it, and will seldom take to the air for more than 1d3 rounds before landing.

Tripoderos are territorial and dislike intruders, even others of its kind, though in mating season two tripoderos may hunt together until a pair of leathery eggs are laid, and the chicks subsequently abandoned.

On Porphyra

Tripoderos are found on the fringes of the Scrublands, to the west of the Great Green, and near the shores of the Green Sea.



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