

THE BOOK OF TIGERS

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The Book of Tigers is the result of a thought experiment, which was in turn thought-provoked by an excellent article on the [Monsters and Manuals](#) blog.

Since humans have transcended their ecology, instinctual fears (darkness, tigers) have become increasingly irrelevant. Big predators simply couldn't keep up with our rapid development of communities, communication, and symbolic intelligence.

Tigers are one of the original predators of humanity. But despite killing 373,000 people between 1800 and 2009, tigers don't evoke the same fear and helplessness that they did a few hundred thousand years ago.

Clearly, we need a more modern tiger.

If a modern tiger exists, it must negate our innate strengths of communication, memory, teamwork, eyesight, and tools. It must take advantage of our civilization and of our intelligence. It must be something that finds a new vulnerability.

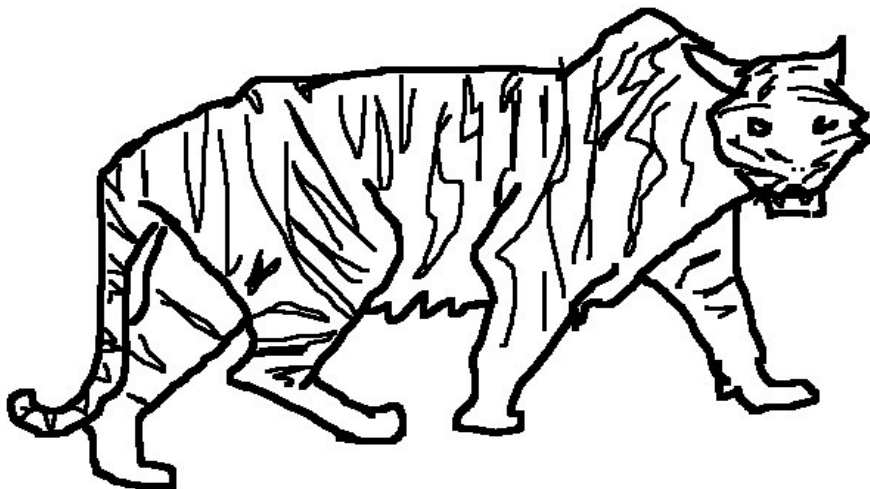
With only a few thousand years to work with, the modern tiger hasn't had time to evolve. But perhaps imagination can do what natural selection cannot, and in that hope, I humbly submit these ten beasties.

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Tigers and Shadows of Tigers

It is well known that tigers can curse their killers. A tiger's curse is inflicted when the tiger's death was in defiance of the natural order: when prey has killed the predator.

The tigers of the Frogwash give the Curse of Slow Numbers. The tigers of Basharna cause their killers to become infertile. And the "tigers" of the Yalte Highlands merely give you fleas. But it is the tigers of Abasinia that bestow the Curse of the Cat's Shadow with their last breaths, and this is the most dreaded.



Once cursed, your shadow disappears. It has turned into a tiger, and it will stalk you over the next seven days. Sometime after that, it will kill you.

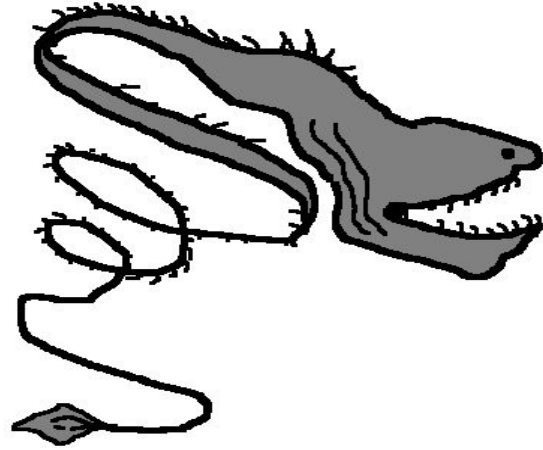
Rakshasas and their servants seem to be able to cast this curse freely, as a spell. Clerics and churches may be able to delay or even remove the tiger curse, but this is not certain.

These tigers revel in your fear, and will not attack once they sense that the dread has built up to a crescendo. Powerful creatures have less to fear from tigers, and so the tiger may never materialize until the creature is old and feeble. But even dragons cannot hunt many tigers with impunity. The tigers accumulate within the stolen shadow, and eventually that dragon will wake up in the cool dampness up his cave and realize that it is filled with tigers.

Shadow tigers have the same stats as normal tigers, except they only leave footprints on stone and can travel through other shadows. The cursed person *must* be the one that ultimately slays his shadow's tiger—if anyone else kills the tiger shade, the curse is not lifted but rather transferred to the new slayer.

Flying Gulleets

They swim above the cities, like a spool of bloody mucus spiraling in the sink. Viscous skin and a brain like gelled frog eggs, all of it summarized and tailing off into infinity. Eyes are shiny, quick, and sunken, resembling an intrusion or a skin disease. Lines of tactile hairs cross its body, and hook-teeth twitch when it smiles.



It's not really invisible. But if you've seen it, you can never see it again. Once you're capable of recognizing it, you'll never get the chance. It's a false invisibility, a paralysis of recognition. You can sometimes figure out where they are if you realize that you can't see the object that they're standing in front of, but this is rare. The blind spot is a big one.

Because they depend on being recognized, they only hunt certain visually-oriented herbivores, predators, and humans. Cows and chickens are safe, since they are too big and too stupid respectively, but pigs are common prey. They lurk at crossroads and frontier-towns. When they get very hungry, they fly into cities, terrify children, hide in attics, and begin a campaign of methodical carnivory.

When they hunt, they float right up behind you, quiet as a strangled dove, and inhale you. It's like being sucked out of an airplane. Then it flies off.

Sarcosyrinx

HD 3

AC 9 [10]

Atk +3 to swallow whole

Move fly 12

Save 14

Morale 8

Special pseudo-invisibility

Swallow Whole: It literally inhales you. You take 1d4 damage per round in the stomach, and fall unconscious in 3 rounds. You can stab the creature from the inside with a small weapon, and you can climb out when the creature dies.

Pseudo-invisibility: If you've never even heard of the sarcosyrinx before, the first one you see will slowly fade to invisibility over the course of three rounds. If you have heard of them before, it will fade out over the course of one round. And if you've seen a sarcosyrinx even once before, they're all invisible to you.

The Hungry Sky

Also known as the "cloudfingers" or "atmospheric jellyfish", you can probably already imagine what these things do. These are balloon creatures the size of barns that spend their entire lives floating several thousand feet above the ground. They slowly maneuver by venting noxious gases. Their main bodies are almost always hidden inside a cloud.

The immature forms of these creatures can sometimes be seen growing on storm-tossed peaks of the Elterspine Mountains. The adults blow down with the winter squalls, and city-folk are wise to stay inside on cloudy winter days. The tentacles of this atmospheric monstrosity are so translucent as to be invisible to a casual glance, especially in the rain. These tentacles sense living things and lift them to their mouths, where they are then eaten. Usually the creatures have fallen unconscious from cold and hypoxia by then, however.

The only warning that most people of a cumulonictus above their city are the small gobbets of flesh and saliva that drop from its mouth—it is a notoriously sloppy eater.

Cumulonictus

HD 12

AC 9 [10]

Atk +8 to grab (and lifted 20'/round)

Atk +8 bite (2d8 damage, only usable at mouth)

Move fly 6 (unless blown by wind)

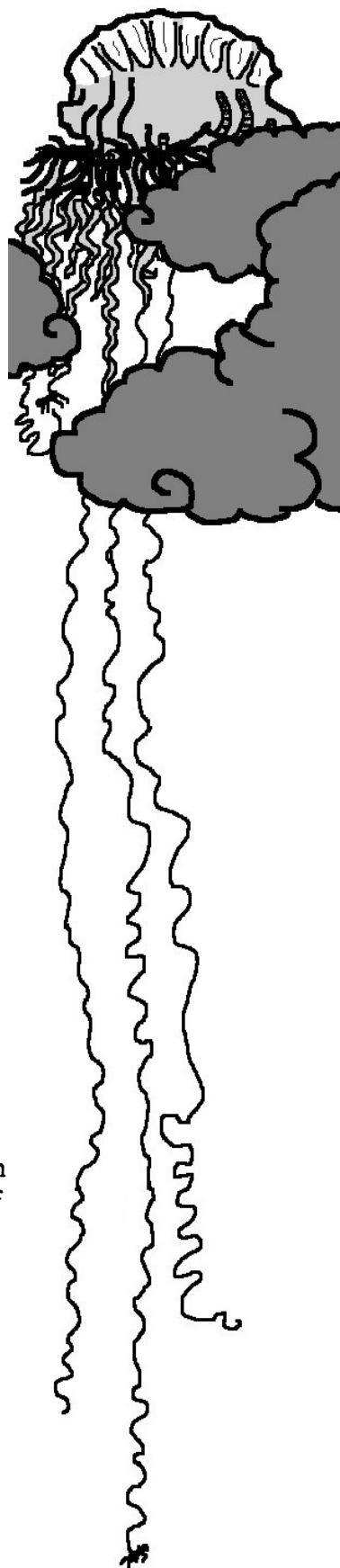
Save 10

Morale 9

Special invisible tentacles

Invisible Tentacles: The tentacles are effectively invisible in rain and very hard to see in cloudy weather (4-in-6 chance of surprise). Their blood fluoresces when exposed to air, so injured tentacles are easy to spot. Tentacles have 3 HD (this doesn't damage the main body).

Thundercloud Kings are especially old and powerful members of their species. They have 14 HD and can electrify their tentacles, dealing 1d6 damage every round. They travel in thunderstorms.



The Names of the Worm

Of the Names of the Worm there are nine. These names are filled with strange vowels, glottal stops, and inhuman elisions. No one can hear one of Names of the Worm without immediately recognizing it as alien and dangerous.

Once you've heard a Name of the Worm, you will never forget it. You will want to speak it aloud, but this is not a magical compulsion. It is a word of power, and even the meanest peasant will want to know what it sounds like from their own lips. Even if they know of the danger, the curiosity will not lesson. It will lurk in your mind for years, decades. And if old age and dementia claim you, the Name of the Worm will be the last thing you ever forget.

It will tumble from your lips while you are asleep. You will cry it in error while in the throes of passion. Those who know a Name and its danger would be wise to take precautions against these events.

Once you have spoken the Name of the Worm, a very literal worm will begin to grow inside your skull. This causes headaches, amnesia, and eventually hallucinations. Once the worm reaches maturity inside your head, you will be compelled to say the Name of the Worm again, and the worm will slither out of your left ear, growing to maturity in the process. At their adult size, they are over 8' long. These otherworldly creatures have been given the trite appellation of "Fangolian Ear Worms".

You will be reduced to a madman, capable of only saying the names of people and objects. You will be compelled to tell people the story of the Name and the the Name itself, but you can never stop yourself from recoiling in horror if the name is said in your presence.

The worms are not gods or spirits or demons, although many people believe them to be these things. Most believe that they are all that remain of our Original Foe, who was defeated so long ago that nothing else is known.

A few scholars believe that the inverse is true: that the Names of the Worm were given to protect us, but that the erosion of eons have obscured their original usage so much that they seem to be only a curse.

Whatever the case, the worms that emerge from our heads are simple beasts. They crawl, hide, hunt, and die. When distressed, they say the name of their "parent". When killed, they say their own name. Scholars tell us that these worms are merely the juvenile forms of something else, but are perpetually stunted by their lack of *something*.

Out of consideration for the reader, I will not print the Names here.

Fangolian Ear Worm

HD 4

AC 5 [14]

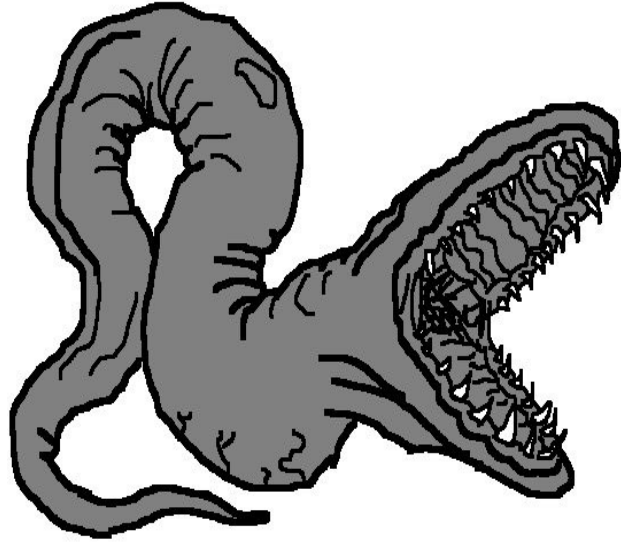
Atk +5 bite (2d6 damage + poison)

Move 9

Save 14

Morale 10

Special babble, poison



Babble: The worm constantly mutters a stream of nonsense, like a mantra. In combat, it will hiss the name of the person who spawned it. When killed it will say its own name, potentially "infecting" everyone nearby.

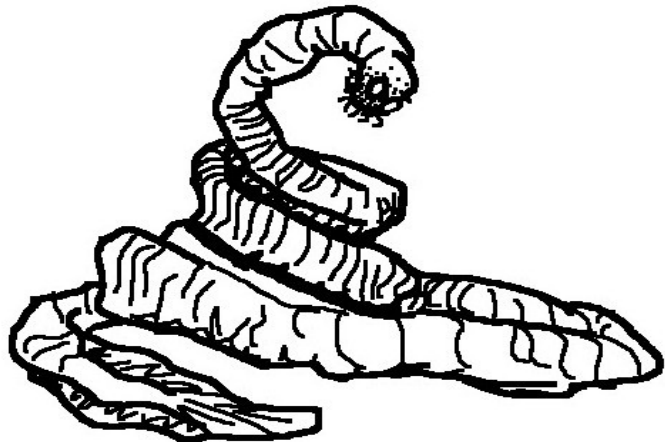
Poison: With a failed save, poison from the worms bite causes paralysis for 1d6 rounds. Additionally, for the next 2d6 days, anything the person attempts to say is reduced to gibberish. They also run a slight fever during this time.

Elder Worms have grown to tremendous sizes over the course of a century. Treat them as 12 HD purple worms, but with appropriate special abilities. They develop near-human levels of intelligence, and sometimes rule over colonies of madmen. They protect these colonies, and dwell nearby or beneath in secret caves with their "grandchildren" worms and adoring worshippers.

The Importance of Being Vulgar

They aren't quite shape-changers; they're more like size-changers. In other respects, Bolgen Worms are like normal tapeworms, and can live for decades inside their mostly-healthy host. They reproduce like any other.

Rather than growing constantly, these tapeworms "store" their growth. After storing enough, they go hunting.



They release a sleep-inducing narcotic and slither out, where they assume their full size. Imagine a princess, deeply asleep in her bed. What appears to be a pale string trails from her body around the corner. By following it, you come face to face with a four hundred pound tapeworm, its head the size of a horse's. It eats you. Satiated, it crawls back inside the princess, who awakes none the wiser (although she may wonder who ate all her plums, and why she has to shit so much).

These predators are deadly in cities (especially elven ones), where there are more taboos regarding defecation and parasites. Since these things are disgusting, they are frequently ignored and rarely revealed to others. Many "sophisticated" people would simply replace their missing cats than go through the messy, disgusting, painful, and potentially lethal process of extracting the worm. Why risk dying in your own shit?

Dwarves rarely suffer from Bolgen Worms, since their binge drinking usually kills the worm. The levels of alcohol required are usually fatal to other creatures.

Occasionally, an angry Bolgen Worm will emerge from a dead creature. Some truly huge specimens have been recorded slithering out from slain dragons.

These stats are for a small-to-medium worm. In combat, it usually opens by spitting acid and slowly retreating, switching to bites when engaged in melee.

Bolgen Worm

HD 4

AC 8 [11]

Atk +4 bite (1d6 damage + 50% to deposit egg)

Atk +4 acid spit (1d6 damage each round until wiped/rinsed off, 30' range)

Move 9

Save 16

Morale 9

Special strong alcohol damages it (like holy water damages undead)

Weeping and Raging, Hissing and Hushed

You will rarely see a Beast of Four Sorrows outside of a city. The formation of one requires exactly four people. These four people must be in a highly emotional state, with a large degree of psychic resonance (both constructive and deconstructive) between them. One must be angry, one must be terrified, one must be heartbroken, and one must be dead.

When situation arises, there is a chance that the four people may explode and recombine. This process fuses them together, but it also incorporates pieces of their environment, usually furniture, tableware, broken glass, and metal shards.

The Beast of Four Sorrows is huge and quadrupedal. Everything else about its form is highly variable, and depends on the people, environment, and circumstances of its birth. Once created, the Beast of Four Sorrows will seek to kill another four people in four different ways. Once that has been performed, the Beast will hide itself.

It may climb down into a basement, sink down into a cave, or shamble into a remote thicket. Once alone, the creature will talk to itself, raging, babbling, and weeping. These four souls will suffer thus until it is destroyed.

Beast of Four Sorrows

HD 6

AC 5 [14]

Atk +6 Smash (1d8 damage)

Move 12

Save 12

Morale 10

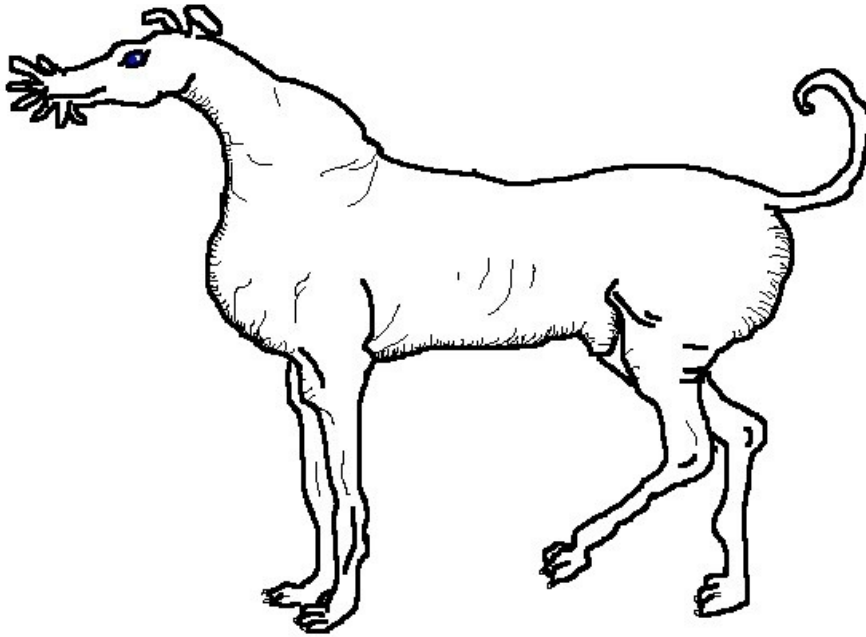
Special psychic attack, despondency

Psychic Attack: Instead of attacking, the Beast may instead cry out. Roll a d4:
1 - Anger. Creatures in 60' must save or attack a creature each round for 2d6 rounds.
2 - Fear. Creatures in 60' must save or flee in terror for 2d6 rounds.
3 - Sadness. Creatures in 60' must save or get -4 to all d20 rolls for 1 round.
4 - Death. Creatures in 60' must save or take 6d6 damage. Any damage taken from this ability is healed one round later (and any resultant deaths are transient).

Despondency: There can be no glorious victory over a Beast of Four Sorrows. A party that destroys a Beast will be overcome with melancholia. They get -1 to all their d20 rolls for the rest of the day unless they perform a funeral for the four people who originally formed the Beast.

Soft and Forgotten

These creatures resemble what you would get if you stretched out a dog into the proportions of a horse, changed its flesh to a flabby white substance, and gave it a ring of tentacles around the mouth. The touch of these tentacles feels like a caress from woman's hand, soft and highly powdered. Its eyes are candy blue, phosphorescent, and eerily soothing when calm. Its body feels powdery (it isn't) and infinitely soft. This is the Alabaster Hound of Yog, sometimes called the amnesia beast.



As soon as it vanishes from your sight, it vanishes from your memory. In fact, all memories leading up to your encounter with the beast are forgotten (although it effects elves differently: see below). In combat, the beast will usually attempt to kill the weakest party member and run off with them, leaving its foes confused and ineffective.

Many a party has suddenly found themselves on the bottom floor of a dungeon without any memories of how they got there. One of their party members is wounded, another is paralyzed, and they can hear the receding shouts of one of their hirelings coming from the hallway as he is dragged away by. . . something. None of them have any idea what is going on, or how they got there. At least, their mapper seems to have a decent map of the place.

Amnesia beasts sometimes get into cities, where they happily snack on people. Witnesses are useless, and search parties forget they ever saw it as soon as the thing gets out of sight. It fights with a random mix of kicks, bites, and tentacle fondles (only one attack each round).

Alabaster Hound of Yog

HD 6

AC 9 [10]

Atk +6 Bite (1d6 damage + naivety on a failed save)

Atk +6 Kick (1d8 damage)

Atk +4 Tentacles (0 damage + paralysis 2d6 rounds on a failed save)

Move 15

Save 13

Morale 8

Special naivety, amnesia, elfwyrd

Naivety: A creature bitten by an Alabaster Hound gets a more permanent form of amnesia. They forget their name, history, and background. More importantly, they forget their class abilities. Wizards forget how to cast spells, clerics forget how to turn undead. To put it another way, the numbers on their character sheets don't change, but the abilities that distinguish them from peasants are lost. The next time they enter a stressful situation that would normally require them to use their special abilities, they get a second save to remember. Otherwise, *remove curse* is the only way to restore this memory loss.

Amnesia: If you gaze upon an Alabaster Hound for a round or less, you instantly forget it as soon as you stop looking at it. If you gaze upon an Alabaster Hound for multiple rounds and then lose sight of it for more than a round, you forget the last 1d20+4 hours. This is permanent.

Elfwyrd: Elves and creatures with Wis 13+ are immune to the Amnesia ability of the Alabaster Hound of Yog. Instead, they cannot forget the Hound. Even stranger, they are compelled to talk in the third person, and refer to the Hound in the first. ("Where did I go? What was I, that thing with the tentacles? Wait, what's wrong with the way the cleric is talking?") Creatures affected in this way get -1 to all d20 rolls because of the distraction. This lasts until they find a way to forget the Alabaster Hound (such as with exotic drugs or the services of a morimancer).

The Beast with 1000 Names

Words describing it fail. Books relating it shrivel. Tales recounting it end.

Each turn, this creature attacks with 2 snapping bludgeons and its vibrating gullet emits another crumple wave. Parties that survive will forever struggle to describe it, even to themselves.

The Indescribable Leviathan

Spiraling Bulk	15 HD
Feathered Leather	AC 3 [16]
Snapping Bludgeons	+12/+12 (3d6 damage, can't both attack the same target)
Peristalsis Gait	move 12, fly 9
Rhythmic Head	save 3
Morale	11
Special	crumple wave, luminous blood

Crumple Wave: 1 target 10'-30' distant takes 5d6 damage and is knocked 10'-60' backwards, landing prone. A successful save halves the damage and the distance, and avoids landing prone.

Luminous Blood: The ichor of an indescribable leviathan has two effects. It both reverses gravity and radiates light (a splash as a candle, a pool as a torch). Creatures in melee have a 25% chance on each hit to splash a significant amount of blood on themselves (unless using bludgeons).

This creature has accumulated an tremendous number of names over its many encounters, most of which are completely inaccurate. Some of these names are: ethereal moose, shaggy gurbirder, planar roc, vector wraith, feral dog-gobbler, infinity worm, double brain scorpion, knocky-wood guardian, dread solipsist, spiral dragon, thorsbane, dire dwarf, mercurial planet-pflenger, and nockenwrath.

Crocodile Inside Your Body

Digression: endogenous retroviruses.

This is how they work: Like any virus, they jump inside one of your body cells. Then, incredibly, they write down all of their instructions on some DNA and inject it into *your* DNA. So now you've got this virus living in the DNA of your cell. When the virus (in DNA form) "senses" that conditions are ripe (food, division, the cops have left), it pops out of your DNA and commences the takeover.

Sometimes, after turning into DNA and hiding in your genome, this provirus gets smacked with a mutation, and it breaks. It gets stuck in your genome because the instructions for getting out of your genome are broken. So it just sits there, like an axe murderer who hid in your closet and then died. And sometimes this DNA gets passed down to your kids. And their kids.

Your DNA is filled with dead axe murderers who crawled in there and died millions of years ago. I only tell this to hopefully impart a sense of perspective.

Back to ordinary fantasy monsters that are imaginary:

A long, long ago, there was a race of terrible reptiles, powerful in sorcery and in war. We know them now as the the Serpent People.

One of their most feared abilities was the power to turn themselves into something akin to a ghost, and then possess your body, making you their puppet. Sometimes, very rarely, they would become trapped in the flesh of their victim. Even more rarely, they had children in this state, and over time, the spirit of the serpent people passed on into their descendants.

Fragmented and thinned, these shards of the Serpent People still echoed in the DNA of the descendants of their slaves. They had become ghosts in the genome.

And although, they are faded and shattered, these shadows of great reptile sorcerers can still be sometimes conjured out of the blacker regions of the bloodline with the casting of a rare spell, known as the *exorcism of the flesh*, in which the cast spirit is cast out and imbued with a body of its own.

The resulting creature is *not* one of the Serpent People. It is sickly wreck, warped by time and diffusion, and made weird by the eons. It walks on four legs and struggles to speak. With difficulty, it may stand upright. This creature is called a crocogon, and nearly all of them are insane.

Antediluvian Croclogon

HD 4

AC 4 [15]

Atk +4 Bite (1d8 damage, grabs on an 8, automatically chews on subsequent rounds)

Move 9, swim 9

Save 13

Morale 9

Special fractured genome, dying



Fractured Genome: The Croclogon has a 50% chance of being able to cast the last spell that the parent creature cast (if applicable). The Croclogon has a 50% chance of being able to breathe sludge (1d4 damage in a 30' cone, a failed save also means that creatures move at half speed and get -2 to attack until they rinse off). The croclogon has a 50% chance to "inherit" a racial ability from its parent. The croclogon has a 50% chance to be intelligent and know secrets in the ancient language of the snake people. The croclogon has a 50% chance to be reasonable instead of immediately hostile and insane.

Dying: When a croclogon is created with the *exorcism of the flesh* spell, roll a d10 to see how many minutes the croclogon can survive before collapsing into a pile of broken crocodile parts and confused ghosties. On a 1, the croclogon dies upon arriving. On a 10, the croclogon is stable, and will survive indefinitely.

Liquid Zoo

The creation of life is a violent art, and has more in common with pipe bombs and welding than it does with planting a seed. When in the process of creating a new creature, skin-weaver wizards must duel with flesh in hot laboratories, shoving unwilling life-stuff into into the imperfect meat they labored to build. Instrumental in this process is an almost-creature called a psychoplasm. However, this process sometimes goes awry, and the jellied mindlet cascades past the safeguards and escapes.

Psychoplasms are liquid zoos, swimming with all the juices of all the animals it has ever encountered and imagined. There's penguin blood in there, churning around with cerebrospinal fluid of pigs and the amniotic juices of dragon eggs. It echoes these forms without thinking. It is more of a chemical reaction than it is a creature. It has no mind.

It tracks living creatures the way flowers track the sun, turning and growing under exposure. The psychoplasm is different as the sky is from the sea, although all three are beautiful shades of blue.

It's fast. It bubbles and leaps, skittering across the ground like a drop of water on a hot skillet. It reacts to minds. It needs to coat your brain and minimize the surface tension. It pours itself sideways under the hydraulics of external consciousnesses.

It has no fixed size or shape. It barely has a fixed location. It's an electric blue fluid that constantly produces armors, tools, faces, weapons . . . each and all bobbing to the surface as it is needed and then sinking away again. It "borrows" the best stats from the creatures nearby. This should be obvious, such as the paladin's armor suddenly appears on the thing or the fighter's sword arm swings out from it (but all made of blue jelly).

And the whole time, you can see animals swimming it, recreated from memory—both its own and the memories of others. Giraffes, harpies, dragons. . . your dead mother may even appear in the psychoplasm, noiselessly mouthing words of encouragement. Your old instructor might shake his head in disappointment as he watches you stumble and the blue jelly lashes you to ribbons.

An antagonistic psychoplasm is attracted to minds. If you want to anthropomorphize its intentions, it "wants" to pluck your brain out of your skull and place it in the exact magnetic center of its mass. It wants this thing in the same way that heavy objects in the sky want to fall, and its similarly unreasonable about its goals.

Antagonistic Psychoplasm

HD 1 + HD of the highest HD thing in 100'

AC 1 point better than the best AC in 100' (or 8 [11] if alone)

Atk 1 point better than the best AC in 100' (or +1 if alone)

attacks 3 random nearby creatures, each hit does 1 damage/HD

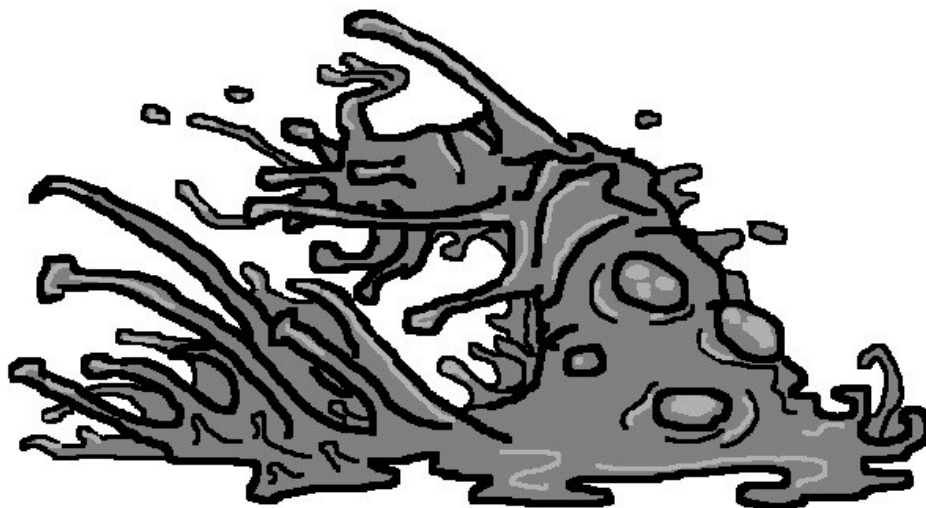
Move faster than the fastest creature in 100' (or 30' if alone)

Save 1 point better than the best save in 100' (or 16 if alone)

Morale 12

Special react, anticipate, chaotic attacks

React: Whenever the Antagonistic Psychoplasm takes damage, it reacts. It is immune to the last three types of damage it received (fire, ice, slashing, piercing, etc). If it takes the same type of damage twice in a row, the second hit actually *heals* the psychoplasm for 1/2 the amount of damage that it would have normally done.



Anticipate: Every turn, the psychoplasm will do something really strange in addition to its normal attacks. Roll at random.

1 - Double in size (8x in volume).

2 - Return to original size

3 - Breathe fire (30' cone, 1d6 damage per HD, save for half)

4 - Lightning bolt (60' line, 1d6 damage per HD, save for half)

4 - Turn into a cube (AC improves by 2 points) and do nothing for 1 turn.

5 - Lose cohesion, turning watery water for 1 turn. Immune to mundane weapons.

6 - Change color.

7 - Split into two, each with half HP. If already split, rejoin instead.

8 - Speak the memories of a random person nearby. 25% chance of deepest secret.

9 - Flee. Rush out, like a ghastly rapid river.

10 - Healing Cloud. All creatures within 10' heal HP equal to the psychoplasms HD + 1 and turn the same color as the psychoplasm until *remove curse* is cast on them.

Chaotic Attacks: Each attack is a randomly determined type. This is mostly for flavor, but you can roll if it really matters. Roll a d8: 1 fire, 2 lightning, 3 ice, 4 sonic, 5 psychic, 6 slashing, 7 bludgeoning, 8 piercing.