

The Marsh Beast

(Andrew Wright)

Ancient tales tell of the mysterious Marsh Beast¹⁾, a half-formed creature of the primordial mire, little-known but much feared by all who dwell near the fens and swamplands of Legend. Late at night, when the mist hangs low, the warbling calls of frogs and toads will cease, and one can hear the sound of something large and bulky moving slowly through the reeds. There will be a sudden scream or howl, and another victim – whether livestock or lone human – will be dragged back into the quagmire, leaving behind naught but a long trail of blood. The Marsh Beast has struck again!



Marsh Beasts are found across Legend, in any swamp or bog that is worthy of the name. From the Swamps of the Jinn to the Trackless Ooze, from the Sleetmarsh to the Cosh Goyopë mangroves, there is at least one, and probably many more Marsh Beasts lurking at the heart of their damp darkness. In summer, when the water level drops and the mud dries up, the Marsh Beast may range further afield in search of prey, slithering into rivers and lakes and even the sewerage systems of ancient cities. For the Marsh Beast is the proverbial spirit of the swamp – constantly mutable and ever-changing – and yet trapped between the different worlds of water and earth, raging in blind hunger at the sheer injustice of its marginal existence...

The first table below contains a plethora of previously published creatures that a GM may place in their adventures as Marsh Beasts of some standing.

3d6	Marsh Beast	Reference	Number
3	Hydra	Bestiary pp. 38–39	1
4	Water Leaper	Bestiary pp. 47–48	1
5	Ganglion	Prince of Darkness p. 84	1
6	Mere Gaunt	Bestiary p. 41	1
7	Man-Slug	Sleeping Gods pp. 61–62	1
8	Winged Snake	Bestiary p. 44	1
9	Mud Monster	The Elven Crystals p. 51	1–2
10	Newtling	Casket of Fays #3 pp. 13–14	1–10
11	Dracoman	Bestiary p. 18	2–20
12	Swamp Folk	Bestiary p. 24	3–12
13	Blood Fiend	Casket of Fays #5 pp. 45–46	1–6
14	Mud Wyrm	Prince of Darkness p. 54	1
15	The Nargut	Bestiary p. 42	1
16	Mere-Troll	Casket of Fays #1 pp. 4–5	1

3d6	Marsh Beast	Reference	Number
17	Wyvern	Bestiary pp. 48–49	1
18	Drac	Casket of Fays #2 pp. 22–23	1

Alternatively, if a GM wants to randomly create an entirely new kind of Marsh Beast, they can consult the following tables. Firstly, roll 1d6 to determine the basic form of the monster.

The Basic Marsh Beast

d6 Roll of 1

Shaggy humanoid: a great, green-furred brute with grasping paws and gnashing teeth.

SHAGGY HUMANOID MARSH BEAST		RE 5	
ATTACK	18	Claws (d6 +1, 5)	
DEFENCE	10	Fur (AF 2)	
MAGICAL ATTACK	N/A	Magic Points	None
MAGICAL DEFENCE	4	Health Points	1d6 +1
EVASION	4	Movement	10m (20m)
STEALTH	14	PERCEPTION	7 (Darksight ²⁾)

d6 Roll of 2

Rotting plant mass: a shapeless form of thrashing roots amidst stench-laden clumps of decaying filth.

ROTTING PLANT MARSH BEAST		RE 4	
ATTACK	16	Roots (d8, 4)	
DEFENCE	4	Bark (AF 1)	
MAGICAL ATTACK	N/A	Magic Points	None
MAGICAL DEFENCE	3	Health Points	3d6 +10
EVASION	2	Movement	8m (16m)
STEALTH	12	PERCEPTION	5 (Darksight)

d6 Roll of 3

Tentacled mollusc: a slimy mauve-ish blob with long suckered tentacles and glaring yellow eyes.

TENTACLED MOLLUSC MARSH BEAST		RE 3	
ATTACK	16	Tentacles (d6, 4)	
DEFENCE	2	None (AF 0)	
MAGICAL ATTACK	N/A	Magic Points	None
MAGICAL DEFENCE	2	Health Points	1d6 +11
EVASION	1	Movement	6m
STEALTH	8	PERCEPTION	6 (Darksight)

d6 Roll of 4

Slimy eel: five metres long, a sinuous grey-scaled muscular fish with recurved fangs, flaring gills, and whiskery jaws.

SLIMY EEL MARSH BEAST			RE 2
ATTACK	14	Bite (d4, 3)	
DEFENCE	2	Scales (AF 1)	
MAGICAL ATTACK	N/A	Magic Points	None
MAGICAL DEFENCE	1	Health Points	1d6 +10
EVASION	3	Movement	15m
STEALTH	16	PERCEPTION	5 (Darksight)

d6 Roll of 5

Huge amphibian: a primaeval swamp lord whose warty wobbly body-sac perches upon powerful splayed limbs.

HUGE AMPHIBIAN MARSH BEAST			RE 4
ATTACK	15	Bite (d8, 5)	
DEFENCE	2	Hide (AF 1)	
MAGICAL ATTACK	N/A	Magic Points	None
MAGICAL DEFENCE	3	Health Points	2d6 +11
EVASION	5	Movement	5m (12m)
STEALTH	12	PERCEPTION	6 (Darksight)

d6 roll of 6

Amorphous slime: a seething formless entity caught between liquid and solid – mutable and everchanging.

AMORPHOUS SLIME MARSH BEAST			RE 6
ATTACK	19	Acidic Appendage (2d6, 6)	
DEFENCE	9	Hide (AF 3)	
MAGICAL ATTACK	N/A	Magic Points	None
MAGICAL DEFENCE	4	Health Points	2d6 +15
EVASION	2	Movement	10m
STEALTH	14	PERCEPTION	8 (Darksight)

All Marsh Beasts have the additional characteristics: Category: Monster; Number: 1; Typical Treasure: Moderate.

Mutations

Roll 1d4. This is the number of mutations that afflict the creature caused by the noxious gases of its chosen habitat, the sorcerous effluence emanating from primeval ruins, or simply the forgotten curses

of now-indifferent gods.

For each mutation suffered by a Marsh Beast, roll a d20 on the table below to determine the exact type of mutation and its effect on the creature and its ability scores:

d20	Mutation	Effect
1	Carapace	The creature has an armoured shell (AF 4).
2	Tentacles	The creature has 2–7 tentacled arms, in addition to any other attacks. Each tentacle has 5 Health Points and attacks separately from the creature. Anyone hit must roll under their Strength on 2d6 to break free or suffer an automatic hit from the creature's main attack. Each further tentacle that hits adds another 1d6 to the Strength roll.
3	Gaseous Breath	Every third Combat Round, the creature will belch up a flaming ball of swamp gas. This will explode on the nearest opponents within 4 metres, with a SPEED of 10, causing 1–6 Health Points' damage.
4	Acid Vomit	Every fifth Combat Round, the creature will vomit forth a cascade of bilious yellow drool on the nearest opponent within 5 metres, at a SPEED of 13. This will cause 2–7 Health Points' damage, and while armour may protect as normal, the acid will destroy any non-magical armour the victim is wearing.
5	Multiple Heads	The creature may have two or even three heads. Roll 1d6: 1–4 one extra head; 5–6 two extra heads. For each extra head, add +1 ATTACK, +1 DEFENCE, +1 Health Point, and +1 PERCEPTION.
6	Venomous	The creature is venomous and its attacks transmit a weak poison (Dragon Warriors p. 122).
7	Plague Bearer	The creature spreads disease. Anyone wounded by it has a 45% chance of contracting Swamp Fever (Dragon Warriors p. 126).
8	Horrific Visage	The creature's appearance is so terrifying it causes a Fright Attack (Dragon Warriors p. 122); however, instead of killing its victim, they will instead suffer a random form of Madness (Dragon Warriors p. 124).
9	It Can Fly!	The creature has a means to fly. This could include leathery bat-wings, feathered bird-wings, membranous insect-wings, or an inflatable gas bladder, depending on what best suits the creature's original form.
10	Spikes and Spines	The creature is covered in spikes and spines. Anyone who successfully hits it suffers 1d3 automatic hits themselves from the spikes (d4, 2).
11	Contagious!	The mutations suffered by the creature make it contagious. Anyone wounded by it has a 45% chance of contracting their own mutation once per combat (roll on this table to determine what it is).
12	Magic Powers	The creature has a magical power it can use once per day. Roll to determine what the power is: 1: <i>Rain</i> (p. 101 ³⁾); 2: <i>Create Bog</i> (p. 96); 3: <i>Roots</i> (pp. 96–7); 4: <i>Suspended Animation</i> (p. 90); 5: <i>Raise Fog</i> (p. 88); 6: <i>Camouflage</i> (p. 107).
13	Prehensile Tongue	Every second Combat Round, the creature can shoot forth a sticky tongue to a range of 4m at a SPEED of 12 at one selected target. If the victim fails to dodge the tongue, it is drawn towards the creature and suffers an automatic hit from the creature's main attack form.
14	Very Fast	The creature moves very quickly (+1 ATTACK; +1 DEFENCE; +2 EVASION; Movement +5m).
15	Very Strong	The creature is very powerful (+1 ATTACK; Health Points +1d6; Weapon is +1 Armour Bypass and +1 Damage).
16	Howling Scream	The creature gives vent to a piercing shriek that causes a Fright Attack on all adventurers without ear plugs of some description. Survivors must reduce their combat abilities by 2 due to the hideous noise.

d20	Mutation	Effect
17	Magic Resistance	The creature has a strong resistance to sorcery. It has a MAGICAL DEFENCE of 11.
18	Weapon Resistance	The creature cannot be harmed by non-metallic weapons, such as cudgels and staves. Iron and steel weapons cut through its hide easily enough.
19	Extra Eyes	The creature has extra eyes, either upon its head or scattered around its body (+5 PERCEPTION).
20	Camouflage	The creature can change its colour or form to blend in with its surroundings (+5 STEALTH), surprising adventurers on a roll of 1–3 on a 1d6.

Each mutation effectively increases a Marsh Beast's Rank-Equivalent by 1. Feel free to reroll duplicated mutations or mutations that don't fit with the creature's 'style' or body-plan.

As an alternative, the GM could also roll on the pre-existing Marsh Beast table and then modify the original monster with 1d4 mutations from the table above.

Example: Our GM needs to roll up a Marsh Beast fast and wants to create something new. Rolling a 6 on a 1d6 gives them an Amorphous Slime as a starting type, and then a 3 on 1d4 means it has three mutations. Rolling three times on the mutation table yields rolls of 4, 18, and 3, meaning the Slime cannot be harmed by non-metallic weapons and can alternately breathe flaming swamp gas and vomit forth acid. A formidable beast indeed!

This article first appeared in [Casket of Fays Issue 8](#).

1)

Game note: the original Dragon Warriors book published by Corgi in 1985 contained an entry for Marsh Beast on the encounter table for Swamps (p. 139), though this was never elaborated upon. When the Bestiary of Dragon Warriors' second edition appeared in 2008, it too contained the same error (p. 12), despite the game now including more than a few swamp monsters that could have been substituted instead. This short article allows for the GM to roll up a pre-existing Marsh Beast or randomly create their own with which to vex and terrify their players.

2)

The original article did not include these creatures' vision type, so I supposed it to be the same as Swamp Folk.

3)

All spell page references in this table refer to the Dragon Warriors main rulebook.

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