

On the Ecology Of the Mud Dragon

By Ben Lehman in Nostalgia Studio

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(Yes, even that one)

1) Dragons and Mud Dragons

Dragons are great creatures, majestic, wise, and magical, possessed of great treasures, fiery breath, jeweled scales, ferocious appetites, and knowledge beyond the ken of mortal man. Once, they soared through the airs over the land, leaving shadows miles long, devouring whole herds of sheep and cows, kidnapping princesses, demanding tribute from even the greatest of kings and the mightiest of sorcerers.

Unfortunately, not even regarding such trivialities as the square-cube law, the local ecology could scarcely support such gargantuan megafauna, let alone one that reproduced in clutches! Food pressure has driven such the great beasts to near or total extinction, leaving only a few hibernating on the highest mountaintops, deep beneath the earth, and at the bottom of the sea.

In truth, what with the industrialization and rationalization and possibly other -alizations, there is little place for the dragons of old within the modern world.

That's not to say that dragonkind has gone extinct, though. Far from it, they are more numerous than ever. Evolutionary pressure has bred them smaller, darker, and more camouflaged, resulting in the common mud dragon. Traveller and farmers will be familiar with these creatures, topping out at nearly two foot in length, largely content to doze dreamily in swamps and, although they do bite occasional ankle and sometimes have been known to steal small, shiny objects from children and even, on one isolated instance, impersonated Her Majesty The Queen over the course of three days (resulting in the infamous "GIVE MORE CANDY" Act of 1574). everyone can agree that they are much less of a hassle than their larger cousins.

Mud dragons have been known, though, to get cravings that can only be described as throwbacks to their former glory, from time to time. When they are acting on such impulses, it is better not to approach them unless heavily armed.

Their exact methods of eating and reproduction are, like those of their larger cousins, somewhat mysterious and possibly Far Beyond Our Fragile Understanding, but that is hardly of any account to a reputable biologist.

2) The Game

You all play Mud Dragons, up to some sort of hijinks such as: stealing candy from children, fighting over shiny glass beads, having a farting contest, trying to capture a princess, or building a flying machine.

Except for the GM, of course, who pretty much just exists to make your life miserable. GM stands for Ginormous Mudhole, by the way, but you already knew that from other role-playing games.

3) Character Creation

Making up a Mud Dragon is super-simple. This is what you do.

- 1) Record initial values of Patheticness, Laziness, Stupidity, Clumsiness, and Petty Greed.
- 2) Roll twice on the Heritage and Name table
- 3) Roll on the Starting Loot table
- 4) Take two Tokens.

The Attributes:

Patheticness: This measures the depths to which the Mud Dragon's bloodline has fallen. To impress someone, scare someone, or breath little farts of fire you need to fail a Patheticness check.

Laziness: This is the degree of atrophy to what, generations ago, were muscles that could lift mountains. To lift something, push something, or carry anything a decent distance, you need to fail a Laziness check.

Stupidity: This measures the amount of degeneration of the Mud Dragon's brains. To successfully communicate with a human, use a word over two syllables, or operate machinery, the you need to fail a Stupidity check.

Clumsiness: This measures the awkwardness of the Mud Dragon's form. To sneak around, get in a tight space, or fly a short distance, you

need to fail a Clumsiness check.

Petty Greed: This measures the Mud Dragon's impulses to hoard pretty things. To avoid going after the closest pretty thing available, the Mud Dragon must fail a Petty Greed roll.

All attributes start at 14, except for Petty Greed, which starts at 11.

3.1 Name and Heritage Table (Roll Twice)

Roll	First Name	Last Name	Effect
1-2	Fire	Heart	-4 Patheticness, -1 Token
3-4	Swift	Wing	-4 Clumsiness, -1 Token
5-6	Stone	Claw	-4 Laziness, -1 Token
7-8	Ancient	Blood	-4 Stupidity, -1 Token
9-10	Poopy	Butt	+3 Patheticness, +1 Token
11-12	Stupid	Booger	+3 Stupidity, +1 Token
13-14	Watery	Belly	+3 Clumsiness, +1 Token
15-16	Goopy	Nose	+3 Petty Greed, +1 Token
17-18	Sleepy	Spleen	+3 Laziness, +1 Token
19-20	Mud	Worm	+2 Tokens, -4 Petty Greed

3.2 Starting Loot Table

Roll	Loot	Suggested Effect
1-4	Uh, some mud?	Nuttin'
5-7	Pretty Beads!	Shiny!
8-9	Two copper kopeks	Shiny and humans might want them
10	A hawaiian shirt	You look sorta human
11	Groucho glasses	You look really human
12	Stained underoos	+2 Laziness, -4 Petty Greed
13	A pointed stick	-2 for combat
14	A glass ball	-2 Stupidity
15	A magnifying glass	-4 Stupidity
16	A ten foot pole	Useful!
17	A quartz crystal	Extra Shiny
18	A bone from a dog	-4 Patheticness
19	Real Gold!	Super shiny, plus humans want it
20	Not even mud	Extra-super nuttin'

4) Scenario Generation

The players get together and roll on the following charts. If they don't like their roll, they can ask the GM to roll again, but then the GM gets to choose between the two results.

4.1 The Setting

Roll	Setting
1-4	The Swamp
5-8	The Farmland
9-11	A Village
12-14	The City
15-16	On the Road
17	Haunted House
18	Dark Caves Beneath the Earth
19	An Abandoned Temple / Tower
20	Other Planes

4.2 What you can get

1-4	Boredom Alleviation
5-6	Credibility amongst Mud Dragons
7-10	Candy
11-13	Shiny things
14	LOTS of shiny things
15-16	Respect or Acknowledgement from a Human
17	Stuff about old Dragons
18-19	A Princess! (roll on the Princess Hotness Subtable)
20	Roll Twice

4.3 The Opposition

Roll	Opposition
1-4	Your Own Ineptitude
5-8	Fighting Amongst Each Other
9	Other Mud Dragon Pack
10-12	A few humans
13-14	Organized group of humans
15	A whole kingdom
16	Monsters!
17	Magic!
18	Gods
19-20	Roll Twice

4.4 Your Plan Involves (two rolls)

Roll	Thing
1	Brute Force
2-3	Sneakiness
4	Acrobatics
5	Fast-talking
6	Impressing a human with your draconic might
7-8	Indigestion
9	Really loud farting sounds
10-11	A device with more than three moving parts
12	Reading
13	A stripper
14	Lots of stupid non-shiny paper money
15	At least two different types of animals
16	Starting a Religion
17-18	Combat
19	Grave-robbing
20	Roll two more times

4.2.1 Princess Hotness Subtable

Roll	How hot?
1	So beautiful that all men who look upon her are instantly struck mad with longing and must wander the world singing her praises and commit themselves to her every whim.
2	So beautiful that even the sun, moon, and sky are jealous of her beauty.
3	So beautiful that to look upon her is to love her, and princes from as far away as Arabia have sought her hand in marriage.
4	So beautiful that flowers and grasses spring up when she walks, and her voice is more lovely than the song of the nightingale.
5	So beautiful that the greatest poets of the land cut out their own tongues for shame.
6	So beautiful that her father has hidden her away from the sight of any other man for fear of losing her.
7-9	A massive babe.
10-11	Like, totally hot.
12	Penthouse letters hot.
13-15	Pretty cute.
17-16	A nice smile.
18	Really great personality.
19	Actually, not so great of a personality.
20	Roll twice.

The Cheat and cut straight to the Princess rule

If you're only playing the game for one session, just go ahead and add a princess to whatever stakes you rolled.

5) Playing the Game

The players play their Mud Dragons up to whatever the scenario dictates. The GM plays all the other parts of the environment, including other Mud Dragons, humans, and assorted other things that the Mud Dragons encounter in the world. The players job is to play their goofy dragons and pursue the scenario goals with vigor. The GMs job is to make the dragons lives even more difficult.

Doing Things

The dragons will probably want to attempt some things which are outside of their (admittedly quite meager) natural capacities. When doing this, the player must first state what their dragon is hoping to achieve (convince the human to let him by, climb over the wall, catch the sheep from behind, whatever) and what attribute they think is most likely to get in their way. The GM gets to give final say over what attribute is used, though.

Then, the player rolls a die. If the roll is lower than or equal to the attribute value, the attribute has succeeded — the dragon's lower nature manifests and he fails miserably. If the roll is higher than the attribute value, the attribute has failed — the dragon has actually called on some of his old heritage and succeeded through a shocking reserve of competence. Either way, the player and GM work together to describe the outcome.

However, the player may choose to alter the result after the roll. If the player spends a token after the attribute succeeds, they can narrate how, despite the dragon's total ineptitude, they manage to succeed in spite of themselves. If the attribute fails, the player may choose to gain a token, in exchange for describing how, despite the sudden competence of their dragon, they fail anyway.

Another attempt at the same thing or a similar thing must be hindered by a different Attribute and gets a -4 to the roll. Another thing which is helped by a previous successful roll gets a +4 to the roll.

In addition, a roll can result in injury (+1 to an attribute) at the GM's discretion, but only if the attribute succeeds.

Combat

Combat works in three phases, each of which is just an ordinary "doing things" test. Combat can be used to resolve any disputes — the goal is to get the other guy to back down. If the goal is actually to hurt and kill the other person — well, go play any other role-playing game.

Consider this an example of how an extended conflict could work. For instance, you could easily insert a "name-calling" phase before "posturing" that would be stupidity based.

stage one: Posturing. The initiator of the conflict starts by making a Patheticness test. If he wins — he won the conflict and the other guy backs down. If he loses, the other guy wins and he backs down. If that's fine, end. If the guy who backed down doesn't want to, move to the next stage.

stage two: Whacking at each other, biting of ankles. Whoever lost the last stage rolls against Clumsiness, with the usual -4 penalty. If he succeeds, he wins the fight and the other guy backs down. If he fails, he loses the fight and backs down. Regardless, whoever lost gets hurt and takes a +1 Clumsiness penalty (permanent) If the guy who backed down doesn't want to, move to the next stage.

stage three: Wrestling. Now the fight is on the ground. Whoever lost the last stage rolls against Laziness, with the usual -4 penalty. If he succeeds, he wins the fight and the other guy calls uncle. If he fails, he loses the fight and cries uncle. Regardless, whoever lost gets hurt and takes a +1 Clumsiness penalty (permanent) This is the final stage. You can't keep going further.

Shiny Things

Petty Greed is a bit of a strange attribute. You usually don't roll against it to do stuff. Rather, any time you are trying to do something when there is a shiny thing readily available, you need to overcome your Petty Greed first. Good luck! Note that Mud Dragons

have little sense of delayed gratification -- they will pounce on a copper kopek at hand rather than try to get the pile of gold further away.

~~Not-necessarily-shiny-things~~

If you can use an object to help you, you get between +2 and +4 on your roll. If you actually find a use for swamp mud, it's always +4.

6) Other Stuff

Experience

Every time you spend a Token, it gives you an experience. In addition, everyone gets 2 experience at the end of the scenario, 4 if you actually accomplished your goals, 6 if you successfully abducted a princess.

Lastly, if everyone agrees on one player who was totally awesome that session, give that player 3 extra experience.

You can spend two experience to lower an attribute by one, or one experience to raise an attribute by one.

Throwback

If a player has no Tokens remaining, but really wants to succeed a roll that they just failed, they may opt to Throwback. Their Mud Dragon manifests it's true draconic heritage. All attributes drop to 1. This effect lasts until the end of the scene, when the now-great dragon must part from his muddy brethren, bound for great things. The GM narrates how he perishes in a particularly embarrassing way.

Throwback is automatically triggered if any Mud Dragon rolls over his attribute 5 times in a row, or if any attribute goes below 5.

Embarrassment and Death

If any attribute goes to 21, the Mud Dragon is either dead or just so whammed that they can't participate in the rest of the scenario.

Easy Come, Easy Go

Each Mud Dragon may only keep two things. All other things are lost, forgotten, destroyed, or spent between scenarios.

7) Example

Anders, Ben, and Calder sit down to play some *On The Ecology and Behaviour of the Mud Dragon*. Anders is GMing.

Ben makes a character. He rolls 1, 9 and 13. He is playing Fire Butt, who starts with a pointed stick. His attributes are Patheticness 13, Petty Greed 11, everything else 14. He gets 2 tokens.

Calder also makes a character. He rolls 17, 6 and 9. He is playing Sleepy Wing, who starts with two copper kopeks. His attributes are Patheticness 14, Laziness 17, Stupidity 14, Clumsiness 10, Petty Greed 11. He also gets two tokens.

Now that characters are made, it's time to determine the situation. Calder says that Ben has to roll first, because he wrote the damn game. Ben rolls a 10 — the situation is in a village. No one minds, so there aren't any rerolls. Calder rolls next and gets a 14 — what the dragons can get is LOTS of shiny things. Calder really wants to shoot for a Princess, though, so he asks Anders to reroll. Anders rolls a 2 — Boredom alleviation. Being, as all good GMs are, naturally sadistic, he takes his own roll. Ben shoots Calder a dirty look.

Now Ben rolls for the opposition and gets 7 — fighting amongst each other. He, too, goes for the reroll. Anders rolls a 13 — an organized army of humans. and keeps it.

Finally, both Ben and Calder roll for elements of their plan. They get a 5 and a 9 -- fast-talking and really loud farting sounds. Ben asks for a reroll on the 5 -- he doesn't like how that works out. Anders rolls a 14 -- lots of stupid non-shiny paper money. He keeps the fast-talking, instead.

Anders quickly jots down the scenario -- a group of biologists from the Royal Society have travelled out to the swamp to capture some specimens of Mud Dragons. The unwitting Mud Dragons are going to bump into them when they come into town. He doesn't worry about the fast-talking and farting sounds. Those are for Ben and Calder to work out.

Sometime in the game, Fire Butt and Sleepy Wing pound on a farmer's door, trying to seek shelter for the manic biologists. Fire Butt, apt to his name sake, starts making horrible groaning sounds and farting noises, while Sleepy Wing tries to explain to the farmer how his friend is sick and needs help. Calder tests against Sleepy Wing's stupidity (since he is trying to communicate with a human). Calder rolls an 11 -- the attribute wins! He decides not to spend a Token, and so describes Sleepy Wing saying "uh... pretty human... uh... sick... so hot..." and the aging farmer's wife takes that as a pick-up line and is offended. Anders says that she starts screeching loudly and beating him about the head and shoulders.

Ben still wants to try to get inside, so Fire Butt tries to look so impressive that she backs down and lets them in. He rolls against Patheticness, rolling a 14, which would be a victory, except for he gets a -4 penalty because he's trying something a second time. He decides to spend a token, and so Fire Butt succeeds despite himself. He describes how his attempts to look fearsome are so unbelievably cute that the farm wife oohs and ahhs and grabs them both and pull them inside. Ben marks down one experience for the spent token.