



Megafauna

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In Golarion's primordial prehistory, megafauna lived wild across all eight continents, deep underground, and beneath the ocean waves. From armored glyptodonts and towering woolly mammoths to ferocious tyrannosaurs and aquatic plesiosaurs, these massive animals shaped their world, altering landscapes and strengthening ecosystems. Though megafauna aren't as widespread as in ancient times, they can still be found throughout the world—most commonly in regions where urbanization and agricultural intensification have failed to take hold.

Megafauna are diverse and numerous, encompassing amphibians, birds, dinosaurs, reptiles, mammals, and aquatic creatures—some scholars even count insects as megafauna. It should come as no surprise, then, that megafauna's exact categorization is difficult to pinpoint. In the most basic sense, megafauna are big animals, typically size Large and larger. However, megafauna also include any animal that has grown to a much larger size than its mundane relatives. In this instance, even dire rats and other Small creatures can be considered megafauna, so long as they tower over their genetic relatives.

ORIGINS

Megafauna evolve naturally during prolonged periods of plenty, rising in population after generations of abundance in nutrition, territory, and other resources. The resources available in their environment and the amount of attainable food limit the sizes of herbivores and carnivores. For this reason, the largest herbivores tend to grow larger than carnivores. As animals increase in size, they cover greater distances in shorter times, expanding their territories and migratory patterns proportionally, in turn further increasing the resources available to them. For many animals, bigger is better.

Some Darklands scholars purport megafauna were engineered underground. Deep beneath Golarion's surface are massive caverns filled with impossible ecosystems—verdant jungles lit by artificial suns,

vast grasslands locked in perpetual twilight, phosphorescent fungal forests, and countless others. Within these miniature worlds, megafauna were intentionally engineered by long-forgotten creatures. (Numerous underground societies, including drow, cite this incredibly successful breeding and mutation experiment as a precursor to the modern fleshwarping practices.) In time, these megafauna were released onto the surface. Although the migratory paths these ascending megafauna would've used is hotly debated, the existence of surface-dwelling megafauna within the Orv, the deepest of the Darklands' levels, lends credence to these claims.

Some worshippers of Rovagug believe megafauna are monsters born from his blood. After the Rough Beast's imprisonment, these creatures were disconnected from their master and softened, becoming the megafauna we see today. To these fanatics, megafauna must be "freed" from their complacency and reawakened as the monstrous destroyers they once were.

ECOLOGY AND IMPACT

As a species transitions from animal to megafauna, they undergo numerous changes in both behavior and physiology. When an animal becomes larger, fewer predators can kill them as adults. This increases the lifespan of that animal and decreases its mortality rate. This in turn leads to low birth rates and slow population growth. In general, megafauna breed less often, birth fewer young, and take longer to reach maturity. As herbivores grow larger, so too can the animals that prey on them, leading to an increase in the size of the carnivores that hunt them and the vermin that feed off them.

As megafauna increase in size, they also become capable of travelling greater distances. This allows the animal to obtain sustenance from a larger area. Regardless of their form, megafauna play an important role in the transportation of nutrients from bountiful regions to less plentiful ones, helping to

fertilize and revitalize dying and ecologically unstable regions. Because of their mobility, megafauna can cope with ecological pressure, overcrowding, and other difficulties by moving elsewhere, making them more resistant to starvation and resilient in the face of catastrophe. Ecosystems that contain megafauna are less likely to collapse.

Megafauna alter their environment in more obvious ways, as well. Large herbivores trample vegetation with their movement, reduce woody growth, and consume huge amounts of plants, reducing overgrowth and the chance of forest fires. Over time, their presence causes woodland and other environments to transition to grasslands, tundra, and other open environments. The presence of predatory megafauna limits the movements of herbivores and smaller carnivores, as these prey work to avoid large predators. Through their predations, carnivorous megafauna alter animal activity and population abundance.

Humanoids, too, are affected by the presence of megafauna. Hunting and defending against large

animals requires teamwork and extensive planning, although the payoff is also greater—a single megafauna can feed dozens of people for a long time, while the abundance of fur, fat, and bones provide ample fuel and materials for both craft and construction projects. When tamed, megafauna can serve as beasts of burden, mounts, and war beasts, all of which bring huge advantages to their handlers. Although the Kellids of the Realm of the Mammoth Lords are the best-known tamers of megafauna, they're not alone. Orcs, iruxi, hobgoblins, and giants of all kinds are capable megafauna trainers.

MEGAFUNA ON GOLARION

Where megafauna once roamed all across Golarion, today they're a rare sight found only in isolated wilderness, far from the eyes of their neighbors. Explorers and travelers are most likely to find them in the following locations across Golarion.

Deep Tolguth: Deep Tolguth is one of the many vaults within Orv, the deepest region of the Darklands, that sustains a large population of megafauna. In its underground jungles, lakes, and swamps—all lit by a false sun—many dinosaurs, crocodilians, lizards, gigantic vermin, large flightless birds, and warmth-loving herbivorous mammals, such as giant sloths and primates, populate the vault alongside iruxi, orcs, and xulgaths.

Dretha's Cradle: Deep within the frigid Algid Wastes, between the Hold of Belkzen and the Realm of the Mammoth Lords, the orc alchemist Mother Chot fleshwarps megafauna into loyal war beasts, half-living war machines, or undead monstrosities. She's aided in her efforts by the Belkzen beast masters studying her fleshwarping ways, as well as her intelligent fleshwarped creations.

Earthnavel: A massive pit similar in appearance to an inverted ziggurat, Earthnavel in the eastern Tusk Mountains is inhabited by megafauna and spirits from the distant past. Bones collected from the lower layers of Earthnavel indicate the megafauna that once lived there towered over the megafauna present on Golarion's surface today. A small crevice at the bottom of the pit connects to the Darklands, causing many to suspect these tunnels once reached from the Realm of the Mammoth Lords to Deep Tolguth, perhaps even serving as the path by which megafauna first migrated to Golarion's surface.

Hold of Belkzen: Orcs in the Hold of Belkzen greatly value megafauna both as mounts and for their ability to



pull war machines and other heavy loads. Although megafauna no longer live wild in Belkzen, many orcs make regular forays into the Realm of the Mammoth Lords via the Algid Wastes to hunt and capture megafauna. The Ice Tooth hold is among the most determined of those groups, although the Blood Fur and Gore Tusk holds have risen to rival them in the last decade.

Islands: Many islands along the coast of Garund and throughout the Shackles contain small populations of megafauna. Notable among them is Mediogalti, home of the infamous Red Mantis assassins, and Ungoro Tedar, an island where megafauna live not on the surface, but in vast underground caverns.

Mwangi Expanse: The jungles, savannahs, and swamps of the Mwangi Expanse are home to numerous megafauna, primarily dinosaurs, crocodylians, felines, and primates. Although the Expanse is inhabited by a wide variety of humanoid communities, many of these people, including local Zenj, catfolk, grippli, and iruxi, leave intentionally small ecological footprints on their surroundings, often living nomadic lifestyles or in small communities. This has enabled numerous Mwangi megafauna to survive to the present day.

Nagajor: Within the watery jungles of Nagajor, a land ruled by nagas and primarily populated by nagaji, giant amphibians, reptiles, and insects maintain large populations. Creatures like titanoboas and giant crocodiles are apex predators, while megalanias, giant frogs, and giant leeches sit lower on the food chain.

Pit of Gormuz: Carnivorous megafauna are prevalent around the Pit of Gormuz in Casmaron, where Sarenrae is said to have sliced open the world and imprisoned Rovagug. The megafauna here are particularly violent, and locals believe the animals are infected with Rovagug's rage.

Realm of the Mammoth Lords: Nowhere on Golarion are megafauna more prevalent than the Realm of the Mammoth Lords. Only here have humanoid communities lived alongside megafauna on the animals' own terms, maintaining a delicate balance of hunting, taming, and preserving not only megafauna, but the land itself. Throughout the Realm of the Mammoth Lords, megafauna of all sorts live wild, from cave bears and smilodons to castoroides and woolly mammoths. Many Kellid followings train these megafauna as mounts, guardians, war beasts, and pets, treating them with the same respect they treat each other, their environment, and the cycles of nature.

Southern Garund: Far south of the Mwangi Expanse, the nations of Droon and Holmog are known to use domesticated dinosaurs for travel and labor. Megafauna, particularly reptiles and dinosaurs,

are prevalent in the less-traveled regions of these two large nations.

Thunder Steppes: This vast tundra wedged between the Realm of the Mammoth Lords and Sarkoris is the domain of dangerous megafauna twisted by the demonic taint of the Worldwound. More than merely aggressive, these creatures are malicious—even the herd animals of the Thunder Steppes have been known to stalk, hunt, and consume passing humanoids. There's some debate over the fate of the Thunder Steppes. Many believe the animals therein should be healed and the land cleansed through ritual, prayer, and careful rewilding. Others believe that the region is a lost cause and too dangerous to remain as it is; the animals should be culled and the land reclaimed.

Tolguth: Although it's located far to the north, pressed up against the polar ice caps of the Crown of the World, Tolguth is a settlement located within a verdant valley heated by volcanic vents and filled primarily with dinosaurs, including duck-billed dinosaurs, sauropods, and tyrannosauruses, as well as numerous species of terror birds. Tolguth is a rare cosmopolitan center beset by dangerous megafauna and often in need of heroes to protect it, fetch supplies, or lure particularly dangerous dinosaurs away from the city's defensive walls.

Valashmai Jungle: The Valashmai Jungle is a vast rainforest in southern Tian Xia dotted by jagged volcanic mountains and vast swamps. Megafauna live here in large numbers, although they're dwarfed by the jungle's resident kaiju: unique, semi-intelligent beasts of enormous proportions that are among the largest creatures on Golarion (*Pathfinder Lost Omens Monsters of Myth* 36).

Varisia: During the age of ancient Thassilon, megafauna were captured and tamed for war, labor, and experimental stock, just as the Thassilonian empire enslaved and used the giant and humanoid populations of the region. With the fall of Thassilon, the largest megafauna died or fled, while those of middling size—mostly giant animals—found new ecological niches to exploit. For a time, giant animals were common in Varisia, but with the colonization of the region, the lowlands have become dominated by farmland. Today, giant animals clash with humanoid settlements throughout the lowlands while megafauna, including massive aurochs, sand worms, and numerous rhinoceros-like herbivores, live atop the Storval Plateau, a land they share with the Shoanti who have likewise been driven from their lands by foreign intruders and urbanization.

Waterways: Although much has been said of megafauna on land, the vast majority alive today live

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underwater in Golarion's seas, oceans, and deep lakes. Whether giant crabs scuttling ashore, massive whales breaching the water's surface, squids bigger than ships, or turtles mistaken for islands, megafauna thrive in the waters of Golarion. Although terrestrial people rarely have cause to interact with these creatures, coastal communities, sailors, and aquatic humanoids all deal with these animals regularly. Many aquatic humanoids have learned to tame or manipulate aquatic megafauna, just as the Kellid people of the Realm of the Mammoth Lords live and work alongside the woolly mammoths they're famous for befriending.

CREATING MEGAFUNA

There have been countless megafauna, dinosaurs, and giant animals going back through the history of our world, and countless more that can be created for a fantasy world. Creating custom megafauna for your game world enables you, as a GM, to tailor the stories and experiences of your players, further flesh out environments your players explore, and meet player expectations, which is especially important with creatures that have clear ties to the real world but remain in the realm of imagination. Whether you want to create a little-known dinosaur, like the amargasaurus or kosmocerotops, from scratch, reskin a creature into a completely unique megafauna, or increase the size and difficulty of a mundane animal to represent a giant counterpart, the ability to create and mold the game world is at your fingertips. Creating custom megafauna follows the same steps as creating any other creatures, beginning on page 56 of the *Gamemastery Guide*. Further guidance is below.

CONCEPT

As with any creature, the first step in creating megafauna is the concept. If you hope to bring a creature from real life prehistory into your gaming world, most of the work is done for you. A quick bit of research can often get you everything you need to know to bring your creature to life. Likewise, if you hope to make a giant version of any mundane animal, crafting a concept is simple. Creating megafauna from scratch, though, is considerably more difficult.

Whatever your intent, the creature you're creating needs a concept. Consider the unique and interesting features of your creature. Perhaps it has the horns and crest of the aforementioned kosmocerotops, the spines of an amargasaurus, or the odor of a megafauna scavenger that consumes the dead. Decide what you'd like to emphasize.

Then consider the role this creature serves. Is it a solitary hunter, pack hunter, or herd animal? Does it

attack in the open or from hiding? Is it easily scared or stubborn? Even if you're basing your concept on a real-world extinct animal, fossil records are sparse about habits and behavior, so many of these decisions are yours to make.

Consider the forms of attack your creature might have. How does it defend itself? Does it have claws, jaws, tentacles, tusks, or horns? Does it charge headfirst into battle or is it skittish? Does it display complex tactics or use the terrain to its advantage?

Once your concept is solidified, it's time to select the method you'll use to create your megafauna.

METHOD

There are three primary methods you might use to create game statistics for new megafauna: reskinning an existing creature with similar abilities; adapting an existing creature with similar abilities by changing size, level, and perhaps even an ability or two; or creating megafauna from scratch.

Reskinning

Reskinning is the easiest method to create new megafauna. First, search the *Bestiary*, *Bestiary 2*, *Bestiary 3*, and other creature sources until you find a creature with similar abilities, attack methods, or attack forms to the creature you intend to create, in an appropriate level range for your players. Once you find a suitable creature, simply change the creature's description to one that matches your new megafauna and, if necessary, alter a few mechanical details, such as changing a jaws Strike to a tail Strike, adding a climb Speed, or adding appropriate abilities like Grab, Trample, or Swallow Whole.

Adapting

Adapting is slightly more difficult than reskinning, but still a simple process. It begins much the same: search for an appropriate stat block to use as a jumping-off point. Depending upon your megafauna concept, this may be a creature with the appropriate level, size, strength, Strikes, or tactics.

Once you have your base creature, you'll begin to make changes, likely to the level and associated statistics of the creature, or by removing abilities and creating entirely new ones to better suit your megafauna. Advice for creating unique abilities starts on page 67 of the *Gamemastery Guide*, while the rules for selecting your creature's statistics begin on page 59.

Alternatively, you can tweak a base creature with the elite or weak adjustments found on page 6 of the *Bestiary* to increase or decrease the level and difficulty of a creature to better suit your concept. This is

especially useful when creating a giant version of an animal, which can easily be represented by taking the base creature and adding the elite adjustment.

Sometimes, you can take two stat blocks similar to that of your intended creature and combine them, using the statistical chassis of a creature of the appropriate level range, cutting the base creature's abilities, and adding on the abilities of a creature with appropriate Strikes, abilities, or tactics. For example, you might decide that your new desert-dwelling megafauna has the size and statistics of a brontosaurus but can burrow and leap like a bulette. The resulting hybrid creature will be a unique twist on familiar creatures, created with minimal effort and difficulty.

Creating

Creating a megafauna from scratch is the most difficult method, following all the standard steps of building creatures described in the *Gamemastery Guide*.

MEGAFAUNA FEATURES

Whatever megafauna you intend to create and whatever method you choose to utilize, megafauna have numerous similarities and key features, including the following statistics.

Alignment: Megafauna are neutral in alignment.

Intelligence: Megafauna have Intelligence scores of -4 or -5.

Senses: Most megafauna have either low-light vision or darkvision. Other common senses megafauna might have include echolocation (as a precise sense) and scent or tremorsense (as imprecise senses).

Special Defenses: Although not impossible, it's rare for megafauna to have special defenses such as regeneration, immunities, resistances, or weaknesses. Include them only if they are key to your concept.

Skills: Megafauna have only a few skills, which are focused on their physical abilities and methods of survival. These are usually Acrobatics, Athletics, Stealth, or Survival.

Traits: Megafauna have the animal trait. Dinosaurs have the dinosaur trait, and creatures that live in the water might have the aquatic or amphibious traits.

Omissions: Megafauna don't have languages, items, or spells. They almost never have magical abilities.

ABILITIES

Megafauna, like most animals, are made special by their unique features, which can be expressed

through their modes of movement, Strikes, and abilities. As you create these abilities, take into account where your megafauna lives—is this a harsh environment? If so, how has this creature adapted to survive? Consider how it interacts with its environment—does it blend in, trample it down, alter it, or adapt to suit it? Consider what your megafauna eats—does it actively hunt, lay in wait, or forage? Finally, consider how your megafauna defends itself. Embracing your megafauna's unique features can make for interesting creatures, exciting encounters, and variety at the gaming table.

REVIEW

As with all creatures, the final step in creating megafauna is to compare your creature to others of a similar level. Additionally, test your creature to see how it functions at the table. Pay close attention to the numbers—can it be hit, does it endure as intended, and are its Strikes fair—as well as the abilities, feel, and pace of the combat. Most importantly, do the creature's abilities reflect the megafauna you intended to create? If not, do some tweaking and give it another test. In the end, your megafauna will be better for it.



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