



Fig. I: The Snallygaster over the barn, exactly as the papers drew it. House-style plate.

CRYPTID № 9

THE SNALLYGASTER

The most famous monster Maryland never had. A German nursery bogey that a 1909 newspaper war inflated into a metal-beaked, one-eyed, blood-drinking dragon-bird. Real folklore, a full 5E stat block, and a system-neutral card.

“It was never really in the sky. It was on the front page, and it could fly as far as the paper could carry it.”

THE LEGEND

Before it was a newspaper sensation, the Snallygaster was a nursery threat with a German accent. The families who settled the Middletown Valley of western Maryland carried their monsters over with them from the Rhineland and the Pennsylvania Dutch country. One of those was the schnelle geeschter, the quick spirits, half-heard in the dark air between the barn and the house. Parents warned that it came down without a sound and carried off the children who wandered too far or told too many lies. They painted seven-pointed stars on their barns to turn it away. For a hundred years it stayed exactly that size: a thing you used to get a child indoors before dark.

Then, in the winter of 1909, a country newspaper made it enormous. The Middletown Valley Register was staring down a dead news season, and its men decided to fill the empty columns with a monster. What they printed was a creature no folklore had ever described. It was a beast the size of an outbuilding, with a single burning eye in the middle of its forehead and a beak of hammered metal. It had leathery wings that threw a shadow across a whole field, and long arms like an octopus that hung down to snatch. It screamed, they wrote, like a locomotive coming through a cut, and it drank the blood of whatever it caught. They gave it the old name, Snallygaster, and they ran it as the gospel truth.

The story did what a good story does in a small place with a long winter. It grew. Fresh sightings arrived by the week, each paper trying to out-print the last. The thing had laid an egg the size of a barrel. It had snatched a man off a road and thought better of him and dropped him. It was seen over a dozen towns in a single season. The reports climbed the ladder of respectability until, so the papers swore, they reached the Smithsonian Institution, which was said to have offered to mount the hide, and President Roosevelt himself, who was said to be weighing whether to put off an African safari and come shoot it instead. None of that happened. All of it sold papers. For a few months an entire valley agreed to be frightened together, which is its own kind of fun.

The Snallygaster got a second act, and a fittingly ridiculous death. In 1932, deep in Prohibition, the papers raised it again over the hills near Frog Hollow, and then reported its end. The beast had blundered into a two-thousand-gallon vat of fermenting moonshine mash, been overcome by the fumes, and drowned in bootleg liquor. Federal agents, the account went, turned up to destroy the illegal still and dynamited the whole business, monster and all. It may be the only cryptid on record undone by the combined efforts of its own thirst and the Bureau of Prohibition.

Strip away the ink and the Snallygaster is a clean lesson in how a monster is really made: not stumbled on in the woods but built at a desk, one lurid

detail at a time, by men who knew exactly what their readers wanted to believe. And it left an heir. The same hills would hand up a rival decades later, a wolf-thing called the Dwayyo, said to be the Snallygaster's natural enemy and born the very same way, out of a newspaper with space to fill. Keep a seven-pointed star over your door if it comforts you. But the truth is that this one was never really in the sky. It was on the front page, and it could fly exactly as far as the paper could carry it.

For D&D 5E

STAT BLOCK

The Snallygaster

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 112 (15d10 + 30)

Speed 20 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18	15	15	6	12	10
(+4)	(+2)	(+2)	(-2)	(+1)	(+0)

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +5

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 14

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP) **PB** +3

Flyby. The Snallygaster does not provoke opportunity attacks when it flies out of a creature's reach.

Warded by the Star. The old valley families paint a seven-pointed star to turn the Snallygaster away, and in this telling the superstition has teeth. A creature within 5 feet of a clearly displayed seven-pointed star (a barn hex sign, a scratched token, a symbol drawn in

For Every Other
Game

CREATURE
CARD

The Snallygaster

No stat lines. Just what it is and how to point it at your players, whatever system you run. A dragon-bird that a newspaper built: metal beak, one burning eye, wings that darken a field, octopus arms, and a scream like a train, conjured out of an old German bogey to sell papers through a long winter. It comes from the sky, it drinks blood, and a painted seven-pointed star is said to turn it. Whether any of that is true is exactly the point.

HOW IT BEHAVES AT THE TABLE

- **It comes from the air, silently.** No tracks, no approach, just a shadow across the field and then it is on someone. Reward looking up.
- **It is a story before it is a threat.** The Snallygaster arrives as rumor and

chalk or blood) or openly wearing one has advantage on saving throws against the Snallygaster's Whistle Shriek, and the Snallygaster will not willingly end its turn within 10 feet of one. A GM who wants the doubt can rule the ward does nothing; a GM who wants the folklore to pay off lets the party discover that it works.

Blood Drinker. When the Snallygaster starts its turn grappling a creature, that creature takes 7 (2d6) necrotic damage as the beak draws blood, and the Snallygaster regains hit points equal to the damage dealt.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Snallygaster makes one Beak attack and two Tentacle attacks.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Tentacle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 14). The Snallygaster has four tentacles, each of which can grapple one creature.

Whistle Shriek (Recharge 5-6). The Snallygaster looses a scream like an oncoming locomotive. Each creature in a 60-foot cone must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) thunder damage and becoming frightened until the end of its next turn on a failure, or half as much damage and not frightened on a success.

Running it. The best version of this fight is the one the party is

headline first. Half the tension is whether the party is hunting a monster or a hoax, and you can keep that live for a long time.

- **The old ward works, if you let it.** A seven-pointed star over the door, on the barn, scratched on a shield. Let the players learn the folklore and decide whether to trust their lives to it.

WAYS TO USE IT

- **The newspaper hunt.** The party arrives in a valley whipped into a frenzy by lurid front pages and a posted reward. Is there a monster, a hoaxter selling papers, or both? Let them work it like a case.
- **The thing over the valley.** Livestock drained, a child nearly taken, a shadow no one can prove. A straight monster hunt where the hardest part is getting anyone to agree it is real.
- **Hunt the ward.** The only defense is folklore the locals half-remember. The adventure is recovering the true sign, the right star, the old words, before the next moonless night.
- **Cut it loose from Maryland.** Any town with a struggling paper and a long dull season can grow a monster out of ink. Keep the sky-terror and the manufactured panic; move the valley wherever you like.

not sure is happening. Open with the newspaper, not the monster: a lurid front-page account, a reward posted, a town split between belief and a good laugh. Let them chase reports that never quite line up, and keep the thing in the air and half-seen for as long as you can, because a blood-drinking dragon nobody can confirm is far better table than one standing still to be shot. When it finally commits, the Snallygaster is an aerial grappler: it stoops, seizes with the tentacles, and drinks on the wing, so give it height and things to hide behind. *Warded by the Star* is the gift here. Seed the seven-pointed star early as pure superstition and let a clever player be the one to test it, so the folklore becomes a clue the table earned rather than a rule you handed out.

DIFFICULTY DIAL

- As a *menace* it is an aerial ambusher that fights from above and never on your terms.
- Make it *scarier* by keeping it unconfirmed, all shadow and headline, so the party never knows if the next field holds a monster or nothing at all. Make it *usable* by letting the seven-pointed star truly work, turning the whole thing into a folklore puzzle the players can solve rather than only a beast to outlast.

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