

## Monster ENCyclopedia: Catoblepas

This is a series of articles about specific monsters from D&D's history. Each entry takes a look at the origin of one D&D creature, and tracks its appearances and evolution across different editions. As the third entry in this series originally, this article continues the progress through the alphabet and looks at a creature beginning with C — the catoblepas.

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### Origins

The catoblepas was first described nearly two thousand years ago by Pliny the Elder, as an [Ethiopian buffalo/boar hybrid](#) with a deadly gaze. It likely found its way into D&D via *The Book of Imaginary Beings*, a treatise on monsters written by Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges. The story of the catoblepas as a D&D monster starts with a single paragraph in *The Strategic Review*, Vol. II No. 2. Although this is uncredited in the magazine, it's a reasonably safe bet that Gary Gygax was the author, as he is [known](#) to have used *The Book of Imaginary Beings* as inspiration for several D&D creatures.

The initial description doesn't pull any punches when it comes to detailing how vile and despicable the catoblepas is. It is described as a "totally loathsome creature" with "absolutely no redeeming features". It has a "horrid head" perched on the end of a long neck, a "hideous face" and is "uglier than a warthog". It is also gifted with a snake-like tail capable of swift attacks. These characteristics are theorized to be evolutionary changes resulting from its marshy environment, but it isn't clear why a swamp-dweller would need to be so utterly disgusting as a survival mechanism.

Right from the beginning, the catoblepas has its characteristic deadly gaze, which is said to be the equivalent of a *death* spell with no saving throw. Woe betide any adventurer surprised by the beast, since this results in him or her automatically meeting the creature's gaze. The survival odds leap if the adventurer isn't surprised, since the creature's weak neck means that it has only a 25% chance of raising its head on its first turn. The best strategy for someone encountering a catoblepas in the wild is to run away with quick, erratic movements, as the beast then has only a 10% chance of fixing its gaze on a target.

As well as its deadly gaze, the catoblepas has a tail attack which does 1-6 points of damage and has a chance to stun the target (starting at 75% less 5% per level of the victim). It has 6+2 hit dice, an armor class of 7, and a movement of 6" (half the speed of a typical human). It is semi-intelligent, and alarmingly, the number appearing is given as 1-3. In a group of three catoblepases, the chances of at least one of them raising its head on its first turn jump to 58%, not good odds for an adventurer! At least they are listed as very rare.

*Supplement III: Eldritch Wizardry* contains a single sentence clarification of the catoblepas's gaze attack, noting that it penetrates both the astral and ethereal planes. It also lists the catoblepas in the astral and ethereal encounter tables, and under swamps/marsh.

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### 1st Edition

By the time we get to the *Monster Manual*, the poor catoblepas has gained an offensive odour and bloodshot eyes (which are apparently its most horrid aspect). An alternative theory for its hideous appearance is offered as perhaps being due to some ghastly tinkering with life by a demented godling.



*Monster Manual* (1977)

Its tail is described as “strong and snakey”, and unlike its neck, capable of striking swiftly at enemies. The duration of the stun effect is given as 1-10 rounds. There is an expanded explanation of the odds of meeting the creature’s deadly gaze, but this is quite confusing. “Complete” surprise now indicates that one of the party has met the monster’s gaze; the 25% chance of it raising its head high enough to use its eyes increases by 15% per round if both the catoblepas and its targets remain still, and it is noted that the 10% chance of being hit while fleeing applies even if the target is averting his or her eyes. Such a fleeing victim now gets a saving throw, but it isn’t clear if this is a result of the fleeing, or the averted eyes, nor any indication of how averting one’s eyes might complicate the act of fleeing. Let us pause for a moment to celebrate the unnecessary complexity of early D&D monster descriptions!

From the statistics block, we learn that a catoblepas has neutral alignment, is classified as large in size, and has a 60% chance of being located in its lair. It has treasure type “C”, which could mean copper, silver or electrum coins and gems, jewelry or magic items. Presumably these would be the remains of previous

victims, as the catoblepas does not seem like the treasure hoarding sort. The *Monster Manual* also gives us the first picture of a catoblepas, courtesy of David Trampier, who also provided a similar picture for the *Player's Handbook*.



*Players Handbook* (1978)

In *Dragon* #73, the catoblepas has a dedicated two-page ecology article by Chris Elliott and Richard Edwards, titled *The Ecology of the Catoblepas (or, Looks Can be Very Deceiving)*. But before we take a look at what that article has to say about our featured creature, we're going to get slightly distracted by the history of the "Ecology of..." series itself.

Although it was one of the best known running series in the history of *Dragon*, the "Ecology of..." series didn't start there. The first few ecologies (including the one covering the catoblepas) were written for another magazine, *Dragonlords — Yet Another Fantasy & Sci-Fi Roleplaying Magazine*. In *Imagine* #32, Paul Mason explains that Elliott and Edwards wrote these initial articles as humorous parodies, rather than serious additions to D&D lore. Despite this, Gary Gygax enjoyed them enough to arrange for them to be reprinted in *Dragon*, and thus the "Ecology of..." series began.

So with that caveat in mind, what does *Dragon* #73 have to say about the catoblepas? First, it pokes a little bit of fun at the description in the *Monster Manual* (or as the article refers to it, the "Bestiary of Xygag") by questioning how anyone figured out that the catoblepas has bloodshot eyes, given its deadly gaze. However, it then goes on to explain that it is not, in fact, the creature's gaze that kills, but an invisible cloud of deadly gas belched out by the beast.



*Dragon* #73 (1983)

More importantly though, the article declares that the *Monster Manual* entry only describes the female of the catoblepas species. The male is a much smaller, faster, almost kangaroo-like creature which is not immune to the female's poison gas. These males generally steer clear of their deadly partners, but during mating season, the females exude a scent which (almost) overpowers the males' instinct for self-preservation. A male wishing to mate waits until the female has her head buried in swamp ooze (so she is unable to belch poison gaze), races up to her (dodging her tail) and mates *extremely* quickly, before fleeing.

The young are born six months later, and because they have been exposed to mild doses of the toxin before birth, are immune to it, at least for their first year of life. These young are also genderless, only differentiating into males and females later in their development, at which point the females become permanently immune to their own poison, while the males undergo a physiological change which removes their resistance to the toxin.

In the *Sage Advice* column in *Dragon* #79, the question is raised of whether the "Ecology of..." article or the *Monster Manual* is correct about the nature of the catoblepas's deadly gaze/gas attack. The Sage notes that the magazine article is "unofficial, offered for the entertainment of (and possible use by) DMs and players alike". The column *Dispel Confusion* in *Polyhedron* #10, clarifies that a creature with a gaze attack, such as a catoblepas, can only affect one member of a party at a time, determined randomly or by position.

*Dragon* #93's *Ay pronunseeAYshun gyd* offers three different ways to say catoblepas: ka-TAB-le-pus, kæt-o-BLEpus, or kæt-o-BLEEPus. The article *Monster Mixing* in *Dragon* #49 focuses on converting D&D monsters to the *Chivalry & Sorcery* rules. It doesn't add anything to D&D lore, but does provide a scientific name for the catoblepas: *Phacochoerus-choeropsis horridus*.

Perhaps because of their possibly game-ending deadliness, catoblepases don't feature much in 1st Edition adventures, and where they do, it is usually only in random encounter tables. There is one in *The Wandering Trees* in *Dragon* #57 and another in the Great Southern Swamp in *I2: Tomb of the Lizard King*. One of the alternate worlds accessible through the doors in Lolth's web in *Q1: Queen of the Demonweb Pits*, is the Black Fen. Catoblepases are listed on the encounter tables for this desolate swamp, but only as a daytime encounter, indicating that the creature is probably diurnal.

The presence of catoblepases in the planes is touched on by a few early sources. *Supplement III: Eldritch Wizardry* has them listed on the combined "astral and ethereal encounters" table, but only outdoors(!). *The Astral Plane* in *Dragon* #67 reminds us that the catoblepas's gaze extends into the Astral, and *Welcome to Hades* in *Dragon* #113 includes the catoblepas on the encounter tables for the First Gloom of Hades. The *Manual of the Planes* lists the catoblepas only in the encounter tables for the Ethereal Plane, and notes that it doesn't exist there, but its gaze can extend into the Border Ethereal.

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## 2nd Edition

The AD&D 2nd Edition *Monstrous Compendium Volume One* ignores the *Ecology* article from *Dragon* #73 entirely, and expands on the original *Monster Manual* entry with a different life cycle and ecology. The catoblepas is said to eat primarily marsh grasses, but about once a month, during full moon, it leaves its sheltered swampy lair to hunt for a meaty meal. It generally feeds on fish, birds, eels, water rats, large amphibians, snakes and other swamp animals, but will settle for carrion.





*Monstrous Compendium Volume One (1989)*

Male and female specimens are physically similar, and mate for life. They raise their young together, and a juvenile catoblepas takes nine years to become a young adult. A catoblepas lives for 150-200 years, and has no natural enemies, which isn't surprising, given its deadly gaze. Interestingly, the catoblepas is now less hostile, and will generally not attack unless it is busy with its monthly hunt (which, to be fair, is when adventurers are most likely to encounter it), or if it feels that its mate or offspring are threatened.

Mechanically, it has the same armor class (7), movement (6) and hit dice (6+2) it did in 1st Edition. Its tail still does 1-6 points of damage, with a chance of stunning. It remains semi-intelligent and large in size (6 feet tall at the shoulder). Its gaze is now specified as a ray, with a 60 foot range. If more than one catoblepas is encountered and they attack, then they will cooperate, attempting to herd their targets into a crossfire.

The catoblepas is listed as having an organization of "solitary", but the number appearing is 1-2, indicating that although catoblepases mate for life, they forage independently unless they have young. The lair of a catoblepas is a sheltered patch of firm ground in the swamp, usually surrounded by tall reeds or other marsh plants. The text confirms that any treasure found in the lair belonged to previous intruders, as a catoblepas places no value on coins, gems or magic items.



*AD&D Trading Cards (1991)*

The first color picture of the catoblepas appears on card #468 in the *1991 Trading Card* set, although “color picture” is a generous description, since with the exception of its eyes, the catoblepas pictured is a murky gray color. Compare that to the shaggy reddish-brown coloured creature in the *Monstrous Manual*, which is a much more intimidating beast. The text description in the *Monstrous Manual* is lifted directly from the *Monstrous Compendium* entry, and doesn’t add any new information about the catoblepas.



*Monstrous Manual* (1993)

As in 1st Edition, there are few catoblepases in 2nd Edition adventures. There is one in Garlin Swamp in *HHQ3: Thief’s Challenge*, and two encounters with a catoblepas in the *Deck of Encounters, Set Two*. The first of these is unremarkable, but in the second, the heroes have an opportunity to capture a live specimen and enter it in the First Annual World’s Ugliest Critter Contest held by the Naturalist Society of Port Sinclair. The prize money in this competition is 35,000 gp and the catoblepas is a shoo-in for the winner if it can be entered. How the Naturalist Society is funding such a generous prize remains unexplained.

In the adventure *Ssscaly Thingsss*, in *Dungeon #70*, the patrol leader of a group of lizard men is riding a catoblepas. No explanation is given as to how the leader or his colleagues avoid the beast’s deadly gaze.

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### 3rd Edition

The 3rd Edition catoblepas appears in the *Monster Manual II*, and is similar to its 1st and 2nd Edition predecessors. Its origins are now said to be the result of a magical experiment gone terribly wrong, but its description (“loathsome”, “ugly”, “bloated”) remains consistent. It is described as having the stumpy legs of a pygmy elephant, and the muscular tail now ends in a chitinous knob. The life cycle, diet, and ecology of the catoblepas is unchanged from 2nd Edition, but it gains darkvision and the scent ability, which allows it to detect and track foes by sense of smell.

A catoblepas encounter might be with a solitary creature, a mated pair or (10% of the time) with a mated pair and a juvenile offspring. While an adult catoblepas still has 6 hit dice, a juvenile has only three, and lacks the

death gaze and stunning tail attack. An adult catoblepas can advance to huge size (7-12 hit dice) or even gargantuan (13-18 hit dice). The range of the death ray gaze has almost trebled to 160 feet, but takes 1d4 rounds to recharge. The ray is now also inexplicably green. Unlike early versions, both the tail stun and the death gaze grant a save. The tail stun lasts for only one round. The gaze does 5d6 damage if it isn't lethal. The catoblepas tends to reserve its gaze attack for defense, and prefers to engage with its tail. The creature will target one foe at a time; even a pair will gang up on a single target before moving on to another.



*Monster Manual II* (2002)

The catoblepas appeared even less frequently in adventures for 3rd Edition than it did in adventures for 1st and 2nd Edition. There is one in *Return to the Temple of the Frog*, a follow up to *DA2: Temple of the Frog*, released as a free download on the Wizards of the Coast website. There are also some catoblepas living in Cosdel farm in an adventure synopsis in *Dungeon #152*, although these are actually cows that have been transformed by the Abyssal energies from a relic.

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#### 4th Edition

The 4th Edition catoblepas, from the *Monster Manual 3*, is quite a bit different from earlier versions, not only in appearance, but also when it comes to its abilities and background. In an [interview](#) on the Wizards of the Coast website, Steve Townshend, who developed this version, says that one of the reasons for adding a more detailed back story was to give adventurers a reason for encountering a creature that would otherwise only be encountered as a wandering monster.

This catoblepas is a creature of shadow, said to plod between worlds, appearing unexpectedly as a harbinger of doom. Visions of past tragedies preempt the creature's presence. Each catoblepas is a herald of the Raven Queen, and strongly associated with death. The Raven Queen's relationship with the catoblepas appears to be complicated. The creatures will sometimes accompany her entourage, but she is also known to bestow her blessing on knights who hunt the creatures, perhaps agreeing to release a departed soul, or granting the ability to see one's own death and thus avoid it. The Wild Hunt undertaken by the creatures of the Feywild often has a catoblepas as a target, since its ability to shift between worlds makes it a challenging quarry. The 4th Edition catoblepas never truly dies, and simply reforms again in the Shadowfell once slain.





*Monster Manual 3* (2010)

There are two types of catoblepas detailed in the *Monster Manual 3*, the harbinger and the tragedian. The catoblepas harbinger appears out of nowhere, in locations where the seeds of tragedy have been sown, and foretells impending death, famine, plague, or war. It feeds on despair, pride and anguish, and this diet causes it to exhale suffocating, poisonous gasses.

Mechanically, it has 220 hit points, a gore attack doing  $2d8+9$  points of damage and the aforementioned potent poison breath ( $2d6+6$  points and additional ongoing damage). This catoblepas also has blindsight, a bonus to saves, and resists necrotic damage. It still has a *final glance* gaze attack, but 4th Edition steers clear of save-or-die effects, so this isn't as immediately fatal compared to earlier catoblepases. The gaze ability is triggered whenever a nearby opponent retreats and affects all creatures in a burst. It does a small amount of necrotic damage, immobilizes the target and makes it vulnerable to further damage. As an aftereffect it does further necrotic damage. An immobilized target with the range of the harbinger will also be within the creature's lethal aura, which causes a target to lose a quarter of its maximum hit points on every failed save. A catoblepas has no fear of dying itself, and focuses on finishing off already weakened foes, so this combination of abilities might quickly prove deadly to an opponent.

The more powerful catoblepas tragedian lives on the bank of a river of souls which flows through the Shadowfell. It has a humanoid face which represents the accumulation of all of the strife it has witnessed. This creature makes a strange deep humming noise that calls living creatures towards it, where the creature's poison breath and withering gaze cause death.

The tragedian has a similar suite of abilities to the harbinger, but it is a much more potent foe. It has 360 hit points, and its gore attack, poison breath, and *final glance* all do more damage. It gains an *inevitable call* ability which draws one opponent close as a minor action, and a *withering gaze* which damages, weakens, blinds and, on a second failed saving throw, reduces the target's hit points to -1. This is not quite the same as death in 4th Edition, but it isn't good news.



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## 5th Edition

The 5th Edition catoblepas was published in *Volo's Guide to Monsters*. It is a comfortable blend of its ancestors from previous editions, seasoned with a sprinkle of new lore. It is still just as “loathsome” and lacking in “redeeming qualities” as it was back in 1976, forty years earlier. In appearance (“bloated buffalo”, “warthog and hippopotamus parts”) and behaviour (“ambling through its marshy home”, “wallowing in mire”) it remains largely unchanged. Its diet — vegetation and occasional carrion — is supplemented by its victims, as the catoblepas is said to enjoy feasting on the fresh remains of those it has slain. As before, the catoblepas mates for life, and will be encountered alone, with a mate, or rarely with a calf.



*Volo's Guide to Monsters* (2016)

The 5th Edition origin story suggests that gods of pestilence and rot created the catoblepas as embodiments of their influence, and the creature's presence gradually blights the area around it. The swamp it dwells in becomes more gloomy and fetid than before. Clean water and healing herbs diminish; swamp gasses become even more foul. Nearby animals become diseased and more aggressive and other degenerative creatures are attracted to the catoblepas's territory. So negative is the presence of the creature, that even a mere rumor of one nearby is deemed to be a bad omen. In heraldry, the shape of a catoblepas symbolizes death and doom.

A previously unknown connection with hags is suggested, with covens of hags keeping one or more catoblepas to milk and tend as cattle. A catoblepas in a swamp might be an indication that there is also a hag nearby. Others with equally impure hearts, such as malevolent warlocks, may also be able to tame a catoblepas and even use one as a mount.

The statistics for the 5th Edition catoblepas are a blend of previous editions, but this is a more powerful beast that it was in 1st or 2nd Edition, clocking in at 8 hit dice (84 hit point) with a tail attack that does 5d6+4 points of bludgeoning damage with the club-like end of its tail. The death ray gaze extends only 30 feet, but does 8d8 necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much if the save succeeds. If the save fails by 5 or more, the gaze does maximum damage (64 points). A target reduced to 0 hit points as a result dies immediately. Borrowing from 4th Edition, the catoblepas's foul smell has a mechanical effect, poisoning those close by unless they make a save. A catoblepas has darkvision, and a keen sense of smell. The 5th Edition catoblepas is faster than its ancestors, with the same movement speed as a human (30 feet).

The catoblepas was reprinted in *Mordenkainen Presents: Monsters of the Multiverse* with only one tiny change from *Volo's*. The creature's *keen sense* has been replaced with a +3 bonus to perception.

We know that Mister Witch and Mister Light, who run the Witchlight Carnival from *The Wild Beyond the Witchlight* once had a catoblepas as a carnival attraction. The pair are overheard commiserating that this didn't work out, and considering a giraffe painted blue as an alternative.

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### Catoblepas parts

According to *Treasures of the Wilds* in *Dragon #137* the tusk of a catoblepas is worth 3-18 gp (3-4 gp per pound), and a young catoblepas can fetch as much as 9,500 gp from the right buyer. By the time we get to 2nd Edition, inflation has pushed the price of a catoblepas "horn" up to 30 gp, based on the price list in *PHBR14: The Complete Barbarian's Handbook*.

The article *A Handful of Keys* in *Dragon Annual #1*, lists the tusk of a catoblepas as a potential portal key to the Paraelemental Plane of Ooze. This could make this part of the creature more valuable in the Planescape setting.

One of the items on the menu in the adventure *The Mad Chefs of Lac Anchois* in *Dungeon #64* is "Foie de Catoblepas". The price tag on catoblepas liver is 12 gp. At least one of the inns in Fort Thesk sells marinated catoblepas, at least if the yarn *Jantharl's Surprising Journey* in *Dragon #413* is to be believed.

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### Catoblepases and other monsters

*Mordenkainen's Fiendish Folio Volume 1: Monsters Malevolent and Benign*, a collection of monsters published in 2019 to raise money for Extra Life, details the assassin bug. Few creatures can survive an infestation of maggots from these human-sized insectoids, but catoblepases have been observed with the deep pockmarks associated with the emergence of juvenile assassin bugs from their bodies.

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### Catoblepases and magic items

*Dragon #130* contains an article titled *If Looks Could Kill* which goes into an almost painful level of detail on the nature of gaze attacks, and how these interact with mirrors. When it comes to the deadly gaze of the catoblepas, a mirror apparently has an unusual effect, splitting the gaze, so that both the target and the catoblepas may be affected by it, albeit with a saving throw because of the weakened magic.

Fortunately, there are a number of magic items capable of blocking the gaze of a catoblepas entirely, including a *helm of gazes* (*Undermountain: Maddgoth's Castle*), a *helm of darkness*, a *wand of magical mirrors* (both detailed in *FR4: The Magister*), a *rod of orbs* (*SJR1: Lost Ships*), and the artifact known as *Johydee's Mask* (*Book of Artifacts*). In 4th Edition, the *invulnerable armor* story item could also serve to protect against the gaze of a catoblepas.

The *shield of Silvam* from *Lands of Intrigue* is an adamantine or mithral shield with a crystal eye-window. Not only can the shield-bearer gaze safely at a catoblepas through this crystal, the shield also has a 30% chance of reflecting the gaze back at the creature, forcing it to make a save.

The catoblepas is one of the creatures that the target of a *paddleboard of wondrous transformation* (Dragon #134) might be polymorphed into.

According to *Volo's Guide to All Things Magical*, when dissolved in the tears of a catoblepas the lynx eye gemstone can form either a base for healing potions, or an alternative ingredient for the making of *Keoghtom's ointment*.

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## Birthright

The *Birthright Campaign Setting Rulebook* notes that catoblepases might be encountered in Cerilia.

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## Dragonlance

The catoblepas features in the first Dragonlance adventure, *DL1: Dragons of Despair*, although only in the random encounter tables. *DLE1: In Search of Dragons* is set in Northern Estwilde and the catoblepas is listed on the shallow swamp encounter tables for the adventure. Catoblepases may be encountered in Southern Hosk, in the southwest of the continent of Taladas, according to *Time of the Dragon*.

In *DL10: Dragons of Dreams*, there is a catoblepas encounter while the heroes are trapped in Lorac's Dragon Orb-induced nightmare. The creature is a dream apparition, so its death gaze does only illusionary damage, and cannot permanently kill its victim.

The 3rd Edition update of the original Dragonlance adventure series culminated in *Dragons of Spring*. The catoblepas from *Dragons of Dreams* is still lurking in the Bleeding Woods, but this version is real, and has become upset and agitated by Lorac's dream, so it will attack anything it senses. It is an advanced version of the *Monster Manual II* catoblepas, with 9HD.

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## Forgotten Realms

According to *Aurora's Whole Realms Catalogue*, there is a cheese known as "Death Cheese" that is made from catoblepas milk. According to *Aurora's*, blind monks and out-of-work adventurers are involved in the creation of this cheese. It is described as a soft cheese with a red paraffin rind, and is sold in 1 lb loaves marked with a stylized imprint of a catoblepas for 5 gp. *Volo's Guide to Cormyr* mentions that prudent shoppers can buy the cheese for just 2 gp per pound in the market of Eagle Peak, and goes on to note that there is a delicately herbed Deadeye Butter which is also made from catoblepas milk, and which is even tastier than Death Cheese.



*Aurora's Whole Realms Catalogue* (1992)

For some reason, the 3rd Edition version of the catoblepas was published in both the *Monster Manual II* and in *Dragon #299* in exactly the same month. The *Dragon* article is titled *The Horrors of Cormyr*, so it has some Realms-specific lore, but the stat block is the same as the one in the *Monster Manual II*, and the descriptive text is just an edited down version. The article suggests that the catoblepas was created by an arch-wizard of Netheril, and notes that they are rare throughout most of the Realms, with the exception of the Farsea Marshes of Cormyr.

There is also an alternative explanation given for the origins of the famous Death Cheese. According to *Dragon #299*, human Marsh drovers of the Farsea Marshes have learned to domesticate and herd the beasts, and they produce and sell the cheese. Exactly how they do this safely is not explained. The article *Heroes of Cormyr* in *Dragon #307* builds on this premise with the Moon Drover prestige class. Catoblepas lore is a special bonus for this class, as is a +4 bonus to saves against its death gaze. A Moon Drover eventually becomes completely immune to the gaze of a catoblepas.



*Dragon #299* (2002)



In *H2: The Mines of Bloodstone*, there is a lone catoblepas dwelling in the “Muckhole of the Catoblepas” in the Temple of Orcus. *Welcome to Waterdeep* in *Dragon #128*, includes 1-4 catoblepases in the encounter tables for the Rat Hills south of Waterdeep. Some of these must have been dispatched by adventurers, as by the time *Ruins of Undermountain* was published, only a solitary catoblepas is listed as a possible encounter. The *Environs of Waterdeep* web enhancement for *City of Splendors* notes that they are still rarely encountered in the Rat Hills in the 3rd Edition Realms.

In the revised *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting* boxed set catoblepases have been reported within the Vast Swamp to the east of Cormyr. *Volo's Guide to the Sword Coast* notes that the Marsh of Chelimber holds the largest known concentration of catoblepases in the Realms, and this is confirmed in *Serpent Kingdoms*. Catoblepases can occasionally be found in a march or peat bog in the High Moor, according to *Elminster's Ecologies Appendix II*.

Year 406 DR on the Roll of Years was the Year of the Catoblepas, although there is no record of any significant catoblepas-related event that year.

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### **Greyhawk**

Catoblepases do not appear to be common in Oerth. One of the cards in the *Greyhawk Wars* accessory/board game mentions the catoblepas, and there are catoblepases amongst the many charmed guard creatures in the Palace of the Overking in the city of Rauxes, as detailed in *Ivid the Undying*.

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### **Historical Reference**

*Thrills and Chills* in *Dragon #68* details adventuring in the Pleistocene Epoch. It includes the catoblepas as a potential encounter for an ice age swamp. *DMGR5: Creative Campaigning* suggests the catoblepas as an appropriate creature for campaigns set in Celtic Ireland or in Africa.

Linking back to the origins of the catoblepas, *HR5: The Glory of Rome Campaign Sourcebook* makes reference to Pliny the Elder's bestiary, and suggests that the catoblepas could be a good special encounter for a campaign set in this historical period. It notes that it was believed to live at the fountains of Nigris at the source of the Nile, and reminds us that the name catoblepas means “downward-looking”, because of the creature's long, weak neck.

Both *Dragon #158* and *Dragon #329* point out that there is some confusion between the catoblepas and the gorgon in Earth history, with Roman folklore (and some later sources) referring to the catoblepas as a gorgon.

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### **Mystara**

In Mystara, the catoblepas is called a nekrozon. According to *Set 4: Master Rules*, ancient lore calls the nekrozon a “catoblepas”, but the term is not in current use. It is mechanically very similar to the AD&D catoblepas, adapted for D&D rules, but gains a few special immunities to instant death effects and energy draining. The illustration makes the nekrozon look much more boar-like than any other picture of the catoblepas.



*Master Rules* (1985)

Statistics for the nekrozon were reprinted in *CM9: Legacy of Blood* and again in the *Dungeons & Dragons Rules Cyclopedia*. Finally, when Mystara became an AD&D 2nd Edition setting, the *Monstrous Compendium Mystara Appendix* confirmed that the nekrozon is identical to the catoblepas, and that the name catoblepas is considered an archaic term — the sort of thing that “one reads in crumbling manuscripts but rarely hears in conversation”.

## Ravenloft

The adventure *Circle of Darkness* notes that catoblepases are commonly found in the domain of G'Henna.

## Spelljammer

The crew from the Spelljammer comic run into a pair of catoblepases on the jungle planet of Boroda in issue #6. These specimens seem to rely less on their tails than usual, as once masked, the local inhabitants have little trouble using one as a steed.



*Spelljammer* #6 (1991)

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## Theros

The world of Theros (*Mythic Odysseys of Theros*) has its own creation tale for the catoblepas. According to legends, a human herder bragged that his cattle were the finest in all of Theros, claiming that the gods Heliod and Nylea had created them. In order to gain favour with Nylea by defending her honour, Heliod persuaded Mogis, god of slaughter, to curse the cattle, turning them into the first catoblepases. Unfortunately for Heliod, Nylea was outraged to be associated with the creation of such foul creatures, and she still offers a boon to anyone who brings the head of a slaughtered catoblepas to her sacred grove. Catoblepases are most likely to be found in the twisting canyons of Phoberos, where Mogis is worshipped.

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## Miniatures

The first, and until recently, only catoblepas miniature made for D&D, was part of Ral Partha's line of metal miniatures in the early 1990s (product code 11-422). The picture below comes from a review of the miniature in *Dragon #174*, which gave it four stars out of five, and notes that "as a swamp creature, this figure can't be beat, even though it will need work".



*Dragon #174 (1991)*

WizKids included an unusual catoblepas miniature as figure 30/45 in the *Mythic Odysseys of Theros* set of the preprinted *Icons of the Realms* line. The bright coloration, large mane and unusual horns seem out of place for a D&D catoblepas, but Theros was originally a Magic: the Gathering setting, and this miniature is clearly based on the artwork for the blight-breath catoblepas card in the *Theros Beyond Death* set.



*Icons of the Realms: Mythic Odysseys of Theros (2020)*, image from [MinisGallery](https://minisgallery.com/)



*Blight-Breath Catoblepas* (2020), image from [Art of Magic: the Gathering](#)

A far more traditional looking catoblepas is figure #26 in the *D&D Icons of the Realms: Monsters of the Multiverse* set.



*Icons of the Realms: Monsters of the Multiverse* (August 2022), image from [MinisGallery](#)



## Comparative statistics

						
Edition	D&D	AD&D (1st Edition)	AD&D 2nd Edition	D&D 3.X Edition	D&D 4th Edition	D&D 5th Edition
Source	The Strategic Review, Vol. II No.2	Monster Manual	Monstrous Manual	Monster Manual II	Monster Manual 3	Volo's Guide to Monsters
Size		L (6' at shoulder)	L (6' tall at shoulder)	Huge	Large	Large
Type	Beast			Aberration	Shadow beast	Monstrousity
Alignment		Neutral	Neutral	Always neutral	Unaligned	Unaligned
No. Appearing	1-3	1-3	1-2	Solitary, pair, or family (3)		
Armor Class	7	7	7	19	24	14
Hit Dice/Points	6+2	6+2	6+2	6d8+30 (57hp)	220 hp	84 (8d10+40)
Speed	6"	6"	6	30 ft.	6	30 ft.
Abilities	Int Semi-Intelligent	Int Semi-	Int Semi (2-4) Morale Steady (11-12)	Str 26, Dex 13, Con 21, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 8	Str 18, Dex 15, Con 22, Int 3, Wis 21, Cha 11	Str 19, Dex 12, Con 21, Int 3, Wis 14, Cha 8
Senses				Darkvision 60 ft., scent	Perception +15, Blindsight 5	Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12, Keen Smell
Saves				Fort +7, Ref +3, Will +6	Fort 22, Ref 20, Will 22	
Attacks	Tail	1	1	Tail slam +10 melee, or death ray +3 ranged touch	Gore +15 vs. AC	Tail +7 melee
Reach				10 ft.		10 ft.
Damage	1-6 + stun	1-6 + stun	1-6 + stun	Tail slam 1d6+12 plus stun	2d8+9	21 (5d6+4) bludgeoning
Special Attacks	Death gaze	Gaze causes death	Gaze causes death	Death ray, stun	Raven Queen's Presence Poison Breath Final Glance	Stench Death Ray
XP		700 + 8 per hit point	975	CR 6	1,000	Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)
Treasure		20% 1-12 x 1000 copper 30% 1-6 x 1000 silver 10% 1-4 x 1000 gold 25% 1-6 gems 20% 1-3 jewelry 10% any 2 magic items	20% 1-10 x 1000 copper 30% 1-6 x 1000 silver 10% 100-600 electrum or platinum 25% 1-6 gems 20% 1-3 jewelry 10% any 2 magic items	1/10 coins, 50% goods, 50% items		

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